

## THE NATURE AND DIRECTION OF MEANING OF -KALI IN KISWAHILI

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the collocations of an adjective stem -kali to create several meanings, showing how -kali can be used to express a wide range of distinct concepts in different occasions of its utterance. It is noted that the few existing studies of Kiswahili adjectives (Ashton 1947, Myachina 1981, Kahigi 2008) which have focused mainly on semantics in determining their meanings, are therefore incomplete because they have overlooked many further meanings of these adjectives in use. Here it is argued that meanings of Kiswahili adjectives can best be exhausted if one takes pragmatics into consideration. This study demonstrates that -kali generates an infinite number of meanings; some of these connotations extend in the direction of negative pole of undesirable attributes and others towards a positive pole. The paper further demonstrates that although the meaning of the adjective stem -kali connoting 'harsh' or 'rude' can be adjusted pragmatically in context, the different meanings created when this qualifier co-occurs with different nouns derive interestingly from the same stem meaning: 'harsh' or 'rude'.*

**Key words:** *linguistic pragmatics, semiotics, Kiswahili adjectives, cognitive semantics*

### Introduction

The nature of meanings has attracted many scholars in various linguistic fields including sentence and structural semantics, lexical semantics, pragmatics, cognitive semantics and semiotics. For example, scholars interested in lexical pragmatics (Barsalou 1987, Carston 2002, 2009, 2010; Allott and Texter 2012) have studied how a word may be modulated to express various meanings in different contexts. Lexical pragmatists are interested in investigating the processes by which literal word meanings are modified in use. According to lexical pragmatists, different meanings could be a result of narrowing, metaphorical extension, broadening, and approximation. In cognitive linguistics, on the other hand, meaning is schematic and relational considerations are of paramount importance. To cognitivists, meaning is regarded as being symbolic, where a symbolic structure is simply the pairing between a semantic structure and phonological structure – that is, meaning has semantic and phonological poles (Langacker 2009). Langacker, who worked on lexical categories,

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defines adjectives as designating different kinds of a-temporal relations. A-temporal relations have one focal participant. According to him, the trajectory of an adjective is a thing (the referent of a noun which the adjective modifies) and it is this thing or referent which is thus described as having a certain property.

One notable scholar who showed interest in studying adjectival meanings is Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004). Dixon introduces what he terms ‘adjective semantic types’. He proposes the following universal semantic classes which he claims to be associated with an adjective class: dimension, physical property, colour, human propensity, value, similarity, quantification and cardinality. Simply put, this implies that wherever an adjective occurs, it expresses one of these semantic classes. With regard to Bantu languages, some linguists (Welmer 1973, Baker 2003, Rugemalira 2008) claim that Bantu languages have a small adjective class. According to Dixon (1977, 2004), a small adjective class always includes terms that fall in the following semantic classes: dimension, age, value, and colour (Goodness 2014). It is claimed that meanings which are expressed by adjectives in Indo-European languages can be expressed by nouns, verbs, or both in Bantu languages (Rugemalira 2008).

There exist a few studies on adjectives in Kiswahili (Ashton 1947, Myachina 1981, Kahigi 2008). Most of these studies are old and have described an adjective category just in passing. These studies, which have mainly used morphosyntax and semantics criteria to define adjectives, report a small number of underived adjectives in Kiswahili. No detailed analysis is made of adjectival meaning. One might therefore assume that adjective meanings are limited and that the few meanings that are expressed by adjectives in Indo-European languages are expressed by derived adjectives, nouns and verbs as claimed to be the case by Bantu scholars (Welmers 1973, Baker 2003, Rugemalira 2008). However, the adjectival force in Kiswahili is far more extensive than these studies suggest. But in order to understand the various meanings expressed by adjectives in Kiswahili, one has to consider pragmatics. If the argument advanced in the following pragmatic analysis proves to be sound, then Dixon’s (1977, 1982, 2004) classification of adjectives into discrete semantic classes is questionable.

In order to study the meaning of a single adjective in Kiswahili, one has to come to grips with the issue of meaning in use. The TUKI (2014) dictionary offers the following meanings of *-kali*:

- i. sharp or edge
- ii. sour or bitter
- iii. severe or extreme
- iv. cruel or ill-tempered

v. keen or avid

If we refer to sense relations, the five strands given above are homographs, i.e. words that share the same written form yet each carries in that form a different meaning. In this paper, the meaning ‘cruel’, ‘ill-tempered’, or ‘harsh’ will be considered as a point from which other meanings originate as pragmatically determined.

An attempt has been made to examine here the different co-occurrences of the adjective stem *-kali*. The researcher has examined different meanings created as a result of *-kali* occurring with nouns of different types. The main interest in this paper is to find out the direction of meaning – that is, which meanings maintain the faithfulness condition (whereby the meaning is directly related to the meaning of ‘cruel’) and which meanings are marked – that is, those meanings that are somewhat related to the *-kali* meaning of ‘cruel’). Since this meaning of *-kali* is related to an undesirable trait, most of its meanings that are directed towards a range of negative connotations are likely to maintain the faithfulness condition; whereas those that are directed towards positive attributes are marked meanings.

This paper examines different meanings created as a result of occurrence of the stem *-kali* with other nouns. Very often when talking about the meaning of words, people tend to think of a dictionary, immediately and assume that the meaning of a word is wholly lexical, and can be discovered in such book. This ignores the fact that many dimensions of a word’s meaning cannot be captured in any dictionary definition because those possibilities depend upon the context of the word’s use. However, even though a single word may create a network of meanings which are pragmatically determined, it is important to stress that the variety of meanings a word can evoke depends upon the nature of that word. That is to say, the meaning of a word according to its use is dependent upon the larger structure, of the language its use occurs. It is misguided to consider the varieties of use one can make of a word as if these uses were effected independently of the broader system in which that word functions morphosyntactically and cognitively. As Wittgenstein’s seminal work is famous for highlighting: “The meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Biletzki and Matar 2018 quoting Wittgenstein (1953: 43).

### **Methodology**

Data for this study was obtained from the researcher’s intuition, secondary sources (newspapers) and a primary source (questionnaire). The researcher examined four newspapers which were published between 2012 and 2018. These newspapers include: *Mtanzania* (2017, 2018), *Mwananchi* (2012, 2014), *Habari leo* (2017) and *Rai* (2017, 2018). From these newspapers, the researcher extracted twenty co-occurrences of *noun* (both concrete and abstract) + *-kali* pattern. The aim of

considering both abstract and concrete nouns was to examine the way different types of nouns influence the meaning of the adjective stem *-kali*. The nouns were categorized into different types such as those referring to taste, smell, touch, hearing, emotions, etc. In other words, the researcher examined different patterns containing the stem *-kali* and investigated the nature of the nouns that co-occur with that stem, and then examined the resulting meanings. These different patterns enabled the researcher to determine the relationship between the stem *-kali* and the noun with which it co-occurs.

To supplement data obtained from newspapers, a questionnaire was administered to third year students at Mkwawa University College of Education. The questionnaire was duplicated and distributed to 150 students. A total of 100 students responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire required the respondent to write examples of phrases and sentences containing the stem *-kali*. It was interesting to note that some phrases and sentences were written by more than one respondent. All phrases that were written by more than one respondent were considered in the analysis. The respondents were required to write the various meanings of the collocations of the stem *-kali*. To ensure reliability and validity of the data, the researcher listed some phrases obtained from both the questionnaire and newspapers and requested two respondents who were conversant with Kiswahili to cross check the responses and comment on their acceptability. The researcher used the data to determine whether the different interpretations were derived from the meaning ‘rude’, ‘harsh’.

### **The concept of *-kali*: semantic information**

The respondents were required to provide examples of phrases or sentences showing the different meanings of the stem *-kali*. The following are some of the examples identified by the respondents:

- (1) a. *pombe kali*  
liquor strong  
‘strong liquor’
- b. *mw -alimu m-kali*  
1-teacher 1-harsh  
‘a harsh teacher’
- c. *harufu kali*  
smell pungent  
‘a pungent smell’
- d. *ki-su ki-kali*  
7-knife 7-sharp

- ‘sharp knife’  
e. *simba m-kali*  
9 lion 1 fierce  
‘a fierce lion’ (Source: data from informants)

The data collected from respondents indicate more or less similar meanings with the meanings provided by TUKI (2014). The results show that -kali can be used with objects, liquids, gases and animates. When used with objects it means ‘sharp’ or ‘bitter’ as illustrated in the examples below:

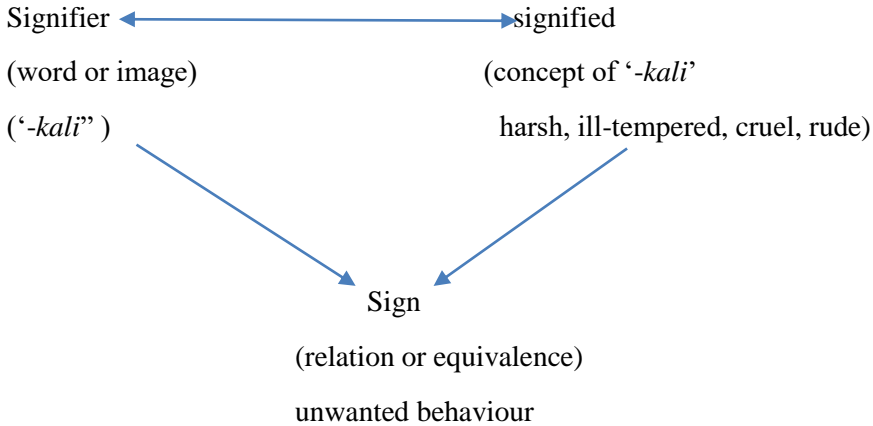
- (2) a. *ki-su ki-kali*  
7 -knife 7-sharp  
‘a sharp knife’  
b. *wembe m-kali*  
razor 3-sharp  
‘a sharp razor’  
c. *dawa kali*  
medicine bitter  
‘bitter medicine’

And so on.

When used with animates, -kali refers to emotional behaviour conveying such meanings as ‘harsh’, ‘fierce’, ‘impolite’, and ‘tempestuous’ as shown in examples (3) below:

- (3) a. *m-tu m-kali*  
1-person 1-‘harsh’  
‘a harsh person’  
b. *m-nyama m - kali*  
9 animal 1-fierce  
‘a fierce animal’

Let us use the meaning of -kali when used with human beings to refer to ‘harsh’, ‘cruel’ or ‘ill-tempered’ as a point of reference from which one would assume that all other meanings originate. De Saussure’s concepts of ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ are borrowed here to illustrate the meaning of -kali.



The illustration above indicates that *-kali* is the signifier, that is, the form or the image being represented. The concept or the meaning represented by *-kali* is the signified. These meanings are such as harsh, cruel, ill-tempered, rude, etc. A sign stands for an idea of *-kali*.

Data collected from informants indicate that when used with animates, the stem, *-kali* can be used in response to behaviour of both animals and human beings. The following are examples of meanings of *-kali*:

*-kali* used with human beings:

- (4) a. Yeye ni m -tu m-kali  
 he/she COP 1SM person 1- harsh  
 ‘He is a harsh person’
- b. Mama yule ni m -kali  
 mother that COP 1 - harsh  
 ‘That mother is harsh’
- c. Joni ni mw-anafunz-i m-kali sana  
 Joni COP 1- student – Nom.suf 1- harsh very  
 ‘John is a very harsh student’

Likewise *-kali* can be used with animals to refer to their behavior.

- (5) a. Simba ni m-nyama m -kali sana  
 lion COP 1-animal 1 - fierce very  
 ‘A lion is a very fierce animal’
- b. Fisi ni m -nyama m-kali sana  
 hyena BE 1SM -animal 1 -fierce very  
 ‘A hyena is a very fierce animal’

- c. *M-bwa m - kali a -me -pig -w- a risasi*  
9 -dog 1-fierce 1SM -PERF -hit -PASS -FV - bullet  
'A fierce dog has been shot'

Examples (4) and (5) above indicate that the different information referred to by *-kali* expresses negativity and is related to harshness, ruthlessness, fierceness and tempestuousness. Such character traits suggest that a sentient agent aroused by anger or aggression may have been responsible for something unpleasant or threatening. This anger might cause one to act irrationally or violently.

### **Contextual meanings of -kali**

This section deals with all those kinds of meaning which do not involve the extensional range of word/multiword/syntactic structure (Dickins 2014). Having traced the meanings of the stem *-kali*, in the following sections an attempt is made to present different kinds of meanings obtained when the stem *-kali* collocates with different words. Meanings of collocations of *-kali* will be categorised into two classes: meanings that refer to negativity and those that refer to positivity.

The next section begins with meanings that express negativity. By negativity one implies that the descriptive adjective *-kali* connotes a state that the speaker would dislike or disapprove. Since in its core meaning 'harsh' or 'cruel', the stem *-kali* denotes something negative, most contextual meanings of *-kali* also refer to negative connotation. In what follows, the different linguistic contexts in which the stem *-kali* occurs to refer to negative connotation will be illustrated. The aim here is to show how the linguistic contexts of a word may give rise to different interpretations which are somehow connected to the lexical meaning of that word. That is, we will next survey the range of negative meanings that dispose the hearer to dislike or disapprove the circumstance or referent described using the expression containing the stem *-kali*.

### **Negative connotations associated with collocations of -kali**

Considering the fact that *-kali* connotes negativity, most meanings to which it contributes refer to undesirable character traits and attributes. The stem *-kali* may be used with substances that can cause death or undergo fermentation when left for a certain period as exemplified below:

*-kali used with concrete things to denote bitterness, sourness etc*

- (6) a. *Dawa hii ni kali sana*  
medicine this COP bitter very  
'This medicine is very bitter'
- b. *A - li- wek - a chumvi kali*  
1SM - PAST put FV salt strong

lit. 'She put strong salt'

- c. A- me - nunua pombe kali  
1 SM PERF buy liquor strong  
'He has bought strong liquor'
- d. Nyoka a -na sumu kali  
snake 1SM-POSS poison deadly  
'A snake has a deadly poison' (Data from informants)

In examining the examples in (6) above, one discovers that the different meanings referring to bitterness are related to the basic meaning of *-kali*, (i.e. harshness or ruthlessness). The descriptive word *-kali* expresses the intensity of the danger. Similarly, the stem *-kali* can be used with words of gas forms to express the following states: choking smell, pungent smell or an acrid smell that gives a sharp sensation.

The following is an example of co-occurrence of *-kali* with nouns concerning smell or breathing, which appeal to the human valuated sense and experience of smelling. Drawing an example from a newspaper 'Maajabu ya magadi soda mbali na kutumika kupikia' in *Mtanzania*, the author comments the following:

- (7) Nguo za mtumba hu -wa na harufu **kali**.....  
cloths of second hand clothes 10SM-POSS- with smell pungent  
'Second hand clothes usually have a pungent smell'  
(Mtanzania newspaper, 29/ December /2016).

Other examples from informants include:

- (8) a. harufu kali  
smell pungent  
'pungent smell'
- b. hewa kali  
air musty  
'musty air'
- c. moshi mkali  
smoke acrid  
'acrid smoke'

Examples (7) and (8) above show that words of smelling are modified by the stem *-kali* to indicate unwanted smells, choking smells, pungent or acrid smells, and so on. These different meanings express negativity. Since the stem *-kali* expresses irritating behaviour which is a disturbance to another human being, it can be equated to an irritating smell caused by a musty air or acrid smoke which is irritating to the lungs or causes other unpleasant affective mental states. Hence, one finds a close



relationship between the two meanings, that is, the one referring to human intentional behaviour and the one referring to the human autonomic sense of smell.

In its expression of negativity, *-kali* can be used to express human emotions as well. In section 1, the paper introduced the meaning of *-kali* to refer to ‘ill-tempered’, ‘harsh’, etc. This next section goes a bit deeper into contextual occurrences of the suffix which convey disapproval for undesirable human behaviour. The following example was extracted from a newspaper by Majaini’s, ‘Hasira inaathiri afya na ubora wa maisha’ in *Mwananchi* 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

(9) *madhara mengine ya hasira kali ni utendaji m-baya wa figo na m-songo wa mawazo*

impact other of anger extreme BE function 15-bad of kidney and 3-stress of thoughts

‘The other impact of extreme anger include kidney malfunction and stress’

Other examples were obtained from informants as shown in (10) below:

- (10) a. *hasira kali*  
temper intense  
‘intense hunger’
- b. *chuki kali*  
hatred intense  
‘intense hatred’

The stem *-kali* co-occurs with words of emotion such as *hasira* ‘anger’, *chuki* ‘hatred’ etc. The stem *-kali* in example (10) expresses negative feeling. There is a relationship between the use of *-kali* in this context and the meaning of ‘harsh’, ‘cruel’. In this context *-kali* co-occurs with emotional behaviour to express the intensity of the emotion. For example, *hasira-kali* ‘bad temper’ indicates a conative or affective mental state of which *-kali* denotes fierceness, ruthlessness, ill-temperedness.

The stem *-kali* can be used with abstract nouns indicating punishment, warning, stern measures etc. The following examples extracted from newspapers are illustrative:

- (11) a. *i- metoa adhabu ya faini na onyo kali*  
9 SM-institute punishment of fine and warning strong  
‘... has instituted fine as a punishment and a strong warning’  
(*Mwananchi* 8<sup>th</sup> August 2015)
- b. *Wa -tuhum -iw -a ku -p-ew-a adhabu kali*

2SM – accuse –PASS -FV    INF- give-PASS-FV-punishment severe

‘The accused to be given severe punishment’ (*Mwananchi* 15<sup>th</sup> June 2016)

- c.     *Wa -baka-o     wa-nafunzi wa -p -ew -e adhabu     kali*  
2SM-rape –REL 2- students 2SM -give-PASS-FV punishment  
severe

‘Those who rape students will be given severe punishment’

- d.     *Wa-nafunzi wa-taka wa- na- o-wa- tia mimba wa-nafunzi wa-  
chukul-iw-e hatua kali.*

2-students 2SM-want 2SM-PRES-REL-2SM pregnant 2-student 2SM-take-  
PASS FV measures stern

‘Students want stern measures be taken against those who impregnate students’  
(11.c: - *Rai* 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016 and 11.d: *Mtanzania* 10<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

In the examples (9-11) above, the stem *-kali* co-occurs with words related to warnings, retributive measures, punishment. In this context, the stem *-kali* shows the intensity of the action. This indicates that the omission of the stem *-kali* in this context would reduce the imperative force against the ignominious action. The stem *-kali* in this context modifies an abstract noun and thereby conveys the same notions of harshness, ill-temperedness, ruthlessness etc. For example, *mtu mkali* ‘a harsh/ill-tempered person’ will normally take stern measures. Therefore, here *-kali* used as a modifier of a human being has a direct relationship with *-kali* used as a modifier of an abstract noun.

In addition, the stem *-kali* can be used with humans to denote disapproval by others of the behaviour of the speaker as illustrates in the following examples:

- (12) a.     *Yeye ni m-kali wa wa-nawake*

He/she COP    1 –active of    2-women

lit. ‘He is known for womanizing’

- b.     *Yeye ni m-kali wa wa-toto*

He/she COP 1- active of    2 -child

lit. ‘He is known for doing sex with young girls’

In examples (12) above the stem *-kali* modifies a noun, specifically a human being. It indicates the behaviour of the participant. This behaviour may be evaluated as positive by the speaker but negative by the society. Although the co-occurrences of *-kali* with the examples above are a result of agreement between two parties, the actions are disapproved by the society. However, if one wants to boast himself, he can find it as a prestige to be capable of having many women.

The stem *-kali* may co-occur with words that refer to talking/speaking. These words of talking/speaking may be verbs or nouns. If it is a verb *-kali* should be converted into an abstract noun and should be preceded by a preposition making the whole phrase function as an adverbial. If *-kali* occurs as an adjective, it modifies a noun. Examples (13) are illustrative.

- (13) a. *A-na -onzea kwa u-kali*  
1 SM-PRES speak by 14-harsh  
'He talks with harshness'
- b. *Faraja a -na lugha kali*  
Faraja 2 SM-PRES language harsh  
'Faraja has a harsh language'
- c. *A -na ma- neno ma -kali*  
1 SM PRES 6 - word -6 harsh  
'He/she has harsh words' (Data from informants)

In 13(a) *-kali* is derived into an abstract noun to make a prepositional phrase. Examples (10) above express the co-occurrence of *-kali* with words of talking to indicate impoliteness, disapproval, etc. The result of this kind of communication is to arouse dispositions to feelings of anger, thus returning to the original meaning of *-kali* in Kiswahili.

The findings show that *-kali* may occur with natural phenomena to indicate a sense of danger, the strength of the natural force etc. The following example was extracted from a newspaper:

- (14) a. *Upepo m-kali wa kusi we-nye kasi ya kilometa 40.....*  
wind 3-strong of south 3-with speed of kilometer 40  
'Strong south wind with a speed of 40 kilometer'  
(*Habari leo* 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017)
- b. *Ha-kuna mahali pa ku-ishi baada ya mvua kubwa i-li-yo-ambatana na upepo m-kali*

NEG-there place LOC INF-live after of rain heavy 9-PAST-REL-accompany with wind 3-strong

'There is no place to live in after a heavy rain which was accompanied by a strong wind'  
(*Mtanzania* 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2017)

The above examples indicate that the different co-concurrences of *-kali* are related to the denotation of a word *-kali*. The adjective stem *-kali* in this context modifies

the noun to denote a strong wind like other types of winds i.e. storm, hurricane, squall, tempest, etc.

The adjective stem *-kali* can co-occur with words of motion to express the concept of ‘speed’ as exemplified in (15) below:

- (15) *mwendo m-kali sana*  
motion 3-speedy very  
‘speedy motion’

In examples (15) above the stem *-kali* co-occurs with words of motion to denote speed. If one examines critically, one can realize that the meaning of *-kali* is somewhat related to the meaning ‘harsh’, ruthless’. The action of driving a vehicle with a fast speed arouses feelings of anger, hatred etc. In this context, the adjective *-kali* modifies a word *mwendo* ‘motion’ to create feelings of fear of that kind of motion. The relationship between the meaning of *-kali* to refer to ‘speed’ and *-kali* to refer to ‘harsh’ is related to the consequence of the action. The consequence of *mtu mkali* ‘harsh person’ may be insulting, fighting, quarrelling, etc. A harsh person will normally speak very fast, sometimes with stammering tongue, etc. The consequence of *mwendo mkali* may be accident. Therefore one can argue that these meanings are related to the meaning of *-kali* that refers to ‘cruel’ ‘harsh’ although the relationship is distant.

The stem *-kali* co-occurs with words of feeling such as hunger, heat or cold to express bodily feelings as illustrated in the examples below from newspapers:

- (16) *-njaa kali sasa Handeni wa-shindia vi-dakwa*  
‘hunger extreme now Handeni 2SM live in 8-dakwa’  
‘... extreme hunger in Handeni, now they live on *vidakwa*’  
(*Rai* 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018)

- (17) *Shirika hili li-me-sha-toa taarifa kuhusu njaa kali*  
Organization this 5SM PERF-PERF-disseminate information about hunger extreme  
‘This organisation has already disseminated information about extreme hunger’  
(*Mtanzania* 15<sup>th</sup> January 2017).

The newspaper quotations above show that the stem *-kali* may co-occur with *njaa* ‘hunger’ to express the extremity of hunger. This collocation *njaa kali* ‘extreme

hunger' implies a feeling that one would not prefer. The collocation *njaa kali* may result to an emotional behavior whose result could be anger.

Precisely speaking, all collocations involving *-kali* in this section refer to a state that a human being would not like. For example, all cases of over speeding as in *mwendo mkali* speedy motion, emotional behaviour as in *hasira kali*, extreme anger, feeling as in *njaa kali*, extreme hunger etc. are not are in the favour of a human being.

### The stem *-kali* to refer to positive connotation

It has been observed that the basic meaning of *-kali* refers to negativity, that is something one would not like. This section takes a different direction by which the meaning of a word becomes positive. The section is devoted to collocations of *-kali* to express positivity. The interest here is to try to show how a word that expresses negativity changes the direction of meaning to denote positive connotations.

Although in most cases the stem *-kali* co-occurs with most nouns to refer to negative connotations, the same stem can be attached positive connotation to express competitiveness, approval, appreciation, complements, etc. The following examples from Tanzanian newspapers are illustrative:

(18) *Upinzani m-kali kwa timu hiyo*  
opposition 3-strong to team that  
'a strong opposition to that team' (Habari leo Newspaper 28/10/2018)

(19) a. *m-chezo m-kali u-ta-kuwa kati ya*  
3-game 3strong 3SM-PRES-BE between  
'There will be a strong game between . . .'

b. *lakini a-ta-pata upinzani m-kali*  
but 2 SM-FUT-get opposition strong  
'but he will face a strong opposition . . .'

The above examples illustrate the occurrence of *-kali* to express such meanings as competitiveness. The adjective stem in this context co-occurs with words related to sports to show competitiveness. Other examples were obtained from questionnaires as illustrated in the following examples.

(20) a. *m-kali wa baiolojia*  
1-good in biology  
'good in biology'  
b. *Diamond ni m-kali wa hesabu*  
Diamond COP 1-good at mathematics

‘Diamond is good at mathematics’ (Data from informants)

In view of the preceding examples, one can realize that the stem *-kali* presents different meanings from the one encoded by the *-stem*. The meaning decoded by *-kali* ‘fierce, ruthless’ arouses feelings of anger. However, the same word in a different pairing conveys a quite divergent meaning. Examples (20) above indicate the different direction of meaning. Whereas in its lexical meaning the stem *-kali* is directed towards negativity, its modulated meanings are extended towards positive pole.

One might ask: Is there a *change* of meaning? Here is where cognitive linguistics comes into play. According to cognitive view, meaning is encyclopaedic. The encyclopaedic view of language holds that semantic structure (the meaning associated with linguistic units including words) provides access to a large inventory of structured knowledge (the conceptual system). This encyclopaedic knowledge, this conceptual system, is grounded in human interaction with others (social experience) and the world around us (physical experience).

In this view, the meaning of a word is regarded as elaborate and complex; it is thereby able to be conceptualised within more than one domain (Mpofu 2009). One explanation for this is that human cognition tends to extend the conceptualisations of a word very far beyond its lexical definition. The meanings obtained in examples (20) above do not involve cases of narrowing, broadening or approximation; they involve change in the direction of meaning altogether. However, one cannot ignore the fact that these different interpretations are derived from, and depend upon, the basic connotation of the adjectival stem under scrutiny.

The meaning of *-kali* can be extended to abstract nouns to convey the meaning ‘excellent’, ‘strong’. The following examples are illustrative:

- (21) *Hoja ya chama pinzani ni kali sana*  
argument by party opposition COP strong very  
‘The argument by the opposition party is very strong’ (Mwananchi 16<sup>th</sup> May 2017)

Similarly, *-kali* can be used with personal nouns to indicate popularity, as in the following example from Mwananchi newspaper:

‘Azam yasajili mkali mwingine.....’

Azam registers another famous (player)’ (Mwananchi 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014).

Other examples from my informants include the following:

- (22) a. *Diamond ni m -kali wa muziki*  
Diamond COP 1SM-superstar in music

- lit. ‘Diamond is a superstar in music’
- b. *Kichuya ni m -kali wa ligi kuu*  
Kichuya COP 1SM superstar in premium league  
lit. ‘Kichuya is a superstar in premium league’
- c. *Mrisho Mpoto ni m -kali wa ma-shairi*  
Mrisho Mpoto COP 1SM a superstar in 6 poem  
‘Mrisho Mpoto is a super star in poems’

Further, the adjective stem *-kali* can be used to connote forcefully the concepts of approval, beauty and good as in the following examples:

- (23) a. *Ni -na -hitaji mwa-namke m-kali*  
ISM-PRES need 1-woman 1-beautiful  
lit. ‘I need an extremely beautiful woman’
- b. *Ni -me-nunua ki -tambaa ki -kali*  
ISM -PERF buy 7 -cloth 7 -beautiful  
‘I bought an extremely beautiful cloth’ (Data from informants)

Examples in (23) above indicate the occurrence of *-kali* with various objects including human beings to show extreme desirability and approval because of the quality, beauty, attractiveness of the referent so described.

The stem *-kali* can be used with objects to indicate sharpness when used with a sharp instrument as shown in the following examples:

- (24) a. *Ki-su ki -kali ki- me -pote -a*  
7-knife 7-sharp 7- PERF lose FV  
‘A sharp knife is lost’
- b. *sindano i-na ncha kali*  
needle 9SM-PRES edge sharp  
‘The needle has a sharp edge’
- c. *We-mbe ni m-kali*  
3-razor blade COP 3- sharp  
‘A razor is sharp’ (Data from informants)

The examples above do not refer to negative connotation. The context of use of *-kali* here indicates that the object is sharp, capable of cutting or chopping. These descriptions are positive and are approved by the speaker. In addition, *-kali* can be used with abstract nouns to show toughness as shown in the following data from informants.

- (25) a. *M-chezo wa leo ni m-kali sana*  
3-play of today COP 3-competitive very  
'Today's match was very tough'
- b. *Hesabu za leo zi -li- kuwa kali*  
arithmetic of today 10SM-PAST be competitive  
'Today's arithmetic was very competitive'

In examples (25), the stem *-kali* occurs with the word *mchezo* 'match', and subject *hesabu* 'arithmetic', to indicate a sense of toughness of the activity of playing or the task of doing arithmetic. The stem *-kali* can be used with some abstract nouns to indicate effectiveness, strength, intensity, etc. It can co-occur with words referring to guard, security, defence, to indicate the strength of the thing being expressed. Consider the following examples:

- (26) a. *Pale ki-tuoni kuna u-linzi m-kali*  
There 7- station LOC 14-defence 3-strong  
'There is a strong defence'
- b. *Kuna u-simamizi m-kali*  
LOC 14-supervision 14- effective  
'There is an effective supervision'

The examples above indicate the co-occurrence of the stem *-kali* with abstract nouns to create a sense of 'strength', effectiveness etc. The meaning of *-kali* in this context refers to intensity of something.

The stem *-kali* can be used with flammable things and natural things to indicate the concept of intense brightness of 'blazing'. The following examples from my informants are illustrative:

- (27) a. *Moto m-kali u-me-unguza nyumba yetu*  
fire 1- blazing- 11SM-PERF-burn house our  
'A blazing fire has burnt our house'
- b. *Jua kali*  
sun blazing  
'blazing sun'
- c. *Taa I -na mwanga m-kali*  
light 10SM -PRES light 3 blazing  
'The bulb has a blazing light'

In examples (27) above, the stem *-kali* modifies words that give light. The collocation here implies 'extremity'. Although the action expressed by the verb *unguza* 'burn'



in (25a) above expresses a bad action that one would not like, the feeling expressed by *moto mkali* ‘blazing fire’ is not necessarily negative.

In some cases, the co-occurrence of *-kali* may indicate neutral connotation. The stem *-kali* can be used with features of the earth to indicate steepness, sharpness, etc. The following examples are illustrative:

- (28) a.     *m -lima            m-kali*  
          3    -mountain    3-steep  
          ‘a steep mountain’
- b.     *m -teremko    m -kali*  
          3    -slope        3 – steep  
          ‘a steep slope’
- c.     *kona kali*  
          corner sharp

‘a sharp corner’

(Data from informants)

Examples of the co-occurrence of earth’s features in (28) above indicate neutral connotation. On the one hand, when *-kali* occurs with words referring to earth’s features it may create a feeling of dislike. For example, if one was driving a car and the brakes of the car failed because of the steep slope, he/she would not be happy. However, on the other hand, the same co-occurrences of *-kali* may indicate positive connotation. For example, other drivers or riders would prefer a steep slope or a sharp corner.

## **Discussion**

The preceding sections are devoted to examination of various contextual use of the adjectival stem *-kali* to create various meanings. It has been observed that these meanings take different directions. Some meanings are towards the positive pole while others are directed towards the negative pole. Some of these meanings are a result of meaning expansion and some are related to metaphorical extension. For example, most meanings referring to positive connotation are metaphorical. Metaphor is a cognitive tool that operates in both verbal and nonverbal communication in various modes simultaneously (Forceville 2009, 2010). Metaphorical extension involves an extension of meaning in a new direction. Some meanings are a result of semantic extension.

These observations reveal that semantic extensions do not occur by systematically shifting from one domain to another. The extended abstract meanings are probably based on metonymic connections. One point of discussion has addressed what it is that determines the direction of meaning. The guiding question has been: how is it

that a word that has a negative meaning acquires extra meanings to express positive connotations.

These data suggest that the nature of human cognition plays an important role in determining what meaning is intended and understood in the practical context of use. The data suggest that there may be an unlimited number of meanings that can be created when a word co-occurs with another word. It has been noted that a number of factors contribute to understanding an intended interpretation. Information obtained from the local context is crucial for understanding lexical collocation of words when they are used in a lexical block. It has been noted that the co-occurrence of any two words is caused either by choice (to invoke an intended sense) or by chance (having no special significance). The main point made in this paper is that all the different meanings of *-kali* are traceable to the basic meaning of *-kali*. It has been shown that an adjective gets its meaning from its trajectory (Goodness 2014). In Langacker's view, an adjective such as *-kali* (my emphasis) exemplifies a 'one participant relation' (Langacker 2008).

These results can be generalised to conclude that the meanings of words are dynamic and that meanings can change their direction depending upon both the intention of the speaker as well as the structure of the language. One cannot ignore the fact that the various meanings assigned to a word are dependent upon human psychology (as argued in Goodness 2016). Moravesik (2001) is of the view that it is not necessary to define all possible and potential variations of meaning of words. But in this paper it has been argued that assigning a single meaning to a word ignores the fact that the meanings associated with a word naturally constitute a flexible and varying list, and that the pragmatic element of word's meaning is typically prolific enough to presume that a word's meaning more often than not will elicit several correct interpretations, all of which should be regarded as standard rather than deviant.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis has attempted to show how the meanings of words multiply and change their directions. The paper has demonstrated how the stem *-kali* is productive such that it can be used to describe both concrete and abstract nouns to create various meanings. The paper concludes that although different co-occurrences of the stem *-kali* may create different meanings, these various, sometimes contrary meanings, are all related to the basic or original meaning of that word.

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