

On the Trail of Inanimate Entities in Kiswahili Classes 1/2, MU1/WA*

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Amidu, Assibi A. 2008. On The Trail of Inanimate Entities in Kiswahili Classes 1/2, MU1/WA. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 16(3), 1-23. This work argues that semantic assignment rules are regarded by Bantuists and linguists as central features of Bantu class systems. Accordingly, Bantu languages distinguish between animate and non animate classes and between augmentative, diminutive, and other semantic features. These features have been taken as more or less unassailable principles about Bantu noun class systems. In this study, we take another look at the animate versus non animate dichotomy. To illustrate our point clearly, we examine the agreement patterns of two NPs *mtoto wa bandia* 'toy' and *mtoto wa meza* 'table drawer' and reveal that they inflect in classes 1/2, MU1 and WA. We also look at similar NPs that inflect in the classes 1/2, and distinguish between linguistic entities and biobotanic entities. We also compare some of our NPs with patterns available in other classes. We conclude that the evidence does not support traditional rules of Bantu classes 1/2 that make the classes exclusively animate in content. We suggest, therefore, that Kiswahilists, Bantuists and linguists would serve Bantu noun categorization theory better if they take cognizance of mother-tongue Kiswahili usage, rather than defend their own versions of Kiswahili in the name of scholarship.

Key words: noun classes, noun categorization, gender, animacy/inanimacy, agreement

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1. Introduction

The questions, 'Who is a sophisticated native speaker?' and 'What is good idiomatic data of a language?' are ones that often need to be tackled by researchers working on languages. Writing about lexical entries, Whiteley(1968, p. 4), notes that,

Lexical items reflect the idiosyncrasies of the human beings who speak them, who not only participate in society as members of larger or smaller groups, but who, as individuals, impose larger or smaller variations on the overall pattern, such that more permanent changes in usage may be effected.

The passage from Whiteley(1968) above shows how linguistic elements are dependent on language use and the people who use them. Since variations in lexical meaning are based on the use of language by different groups of speakers with different degrees of competence in Kiswahili, Whiteley proposes, on the same page, that the best way to resolve paradoxes of usage is to set up what he calls "a scale of sophistication for Swahili." I will not set up "a scale of sophistication for Swahili" in this paper, but the idea reveals that good grammatical Kiswahili may be obtained either from native speakers with a high sophistication in the use of their grammar or from Kiswahili grammarians, linguists and Bantuists who claim special knowledge of the sophistication of native speaker grammars. This study will attempt to determine which of these sources of sophistication should be ranked higher than the other.

2. What Native Speakers say about Kiswahili Bantu

I begin my discussion of "sophistication for Kiswahili" by turning to Shihabuddin Chiraghdin. Shihabuddin Chiraghdin together with N. H. Zaidi, M. Kamal Khan, and O. Saidi wrote four Kiswahili course books

in 1972. In each of them, we find the same introduction to the series written by Charaghdin himself. In his introduction, he makes the following statement (Zaidi et al., 1972, p. v):

Waandishi wa vitabu hivi ni waalimu ambao wamesomesha Kiswahili katika shule za Sekondari kwa miaka mingi na mpaka sasa hawajatosheka kuwa katika vitabu vichache vilivyotolewa kuna ambacho kinatosheleza haja ya mwalimu na mwanafunzi vilivyo.

'The writers of these book are teachers who have taught Kiswahili in secondary schools for many years and yet, even now, they are not satisfied that in the few books that have been published there is adequate information to satisfy the needs of both the teacher and the pupil.'

On page vi of the same work, Chiraghdin makes another point with regard to Kiswahili itself. He writes that,

Inafahamika kuwa lugha ya Kiswahili ni pana na ina matumizi mengi na tofauti katika eneo lote ambalo laitumia lugha hii. Wakati huo huo imeonekana wazi kuwa upeo wa 'Standard Swahili' hauandamani sambamba na upana wa lugha. Basi mwanafunzi analetwa katika vitabu hivi - kidogo kidogo katika vitabu vya kwanza na zaidi katika kitabu cha mwisho - katika kumbi mbali mbali za lugha ya Kiswahili, katika matumizi, matamshi na maandishi yake.

'It is known that Kiswahili language is comprehensive and its uses are many and varied in the entire area in which it is spoken. At the same time, it is clear that the horizon of 'Standard Swahili' does not keep apace with the breadth and depth of the language. For this reason the pupil is being exposed to these books - gradually in the first books and in more detail in the last book - to the many facets of Kiswahili language, its uses, its articulations and its writings.'

Chiraghdin pointedly suggests that Standard Kiswahili lacks the depth and breadth of mother tongue Kiswahili and is in many ways a Simplified Kiswahili. In this study, therefore, I take the position that the views of Kiswahili teachers and writers such as Chiraghdin and his colleagues about Kiswahili constructions are also a reflection of sophisticated mother-tongue Kiswahili usage against which contrary assertions by non native speakers must be treated with some caution and even doubt.

3. What Kiswahilists, Bantuists and Linguists say about Classes 1/2, MU1 and WA

In Kiswahili and Bantu grammatical descriptions and analyses, it appears that non native speakers assume that it is they who are the repositories of sophistication in the use and classification of Bantu classes. So strong is this belief that grammarians and linguists ignore the protestations of sophisticated mother tongue speakers in writing their grammatical works and learned papers. Nowhere is this practice self evident than in the classification of classes 1/2, MU1 and WA, in Bantu. For example, Ashton (1947, p. 10) asserts that,

Thus Nouns with M- WA- as the distinguishing prefixes for singular and plural respectively express the names of human beings, m-tu person, pl. wa-tu.

See also Ashton (1947, p. 29). Ashton (1947, p. 392) was aware that her assertion was theoretically flawed but, nevertheless, pressed ahead with it. Other researchers followed Ashton (1947) and her followers, without re examining the evidence, and affirmed that,

Note that gender 1/2 is a purely semantic gender, containing only animates (the extension of animate concord is discussed in section 8.3). This is reflected by the fact that there is no morphological rule assigning nouns to this gender - they are all assigned by the third

semantic rule. (Corbett, 1991, p. 48)

It is not just Indo European Kiswahilists, Bantuists and linguists who make these assertions. African scholars almost always repeat the same claims about classes 1/2 made by Indo European scholars. For example, Mkude (2005, p. 127) writes that,

Noun classification and distribution remains one of the pillars of Swahili grammar. In the past there was a tendency to emphasize the semantic basis of the classification. Today the perception is that the basis of classification is largely grammatical rather than semantic. However, even today there are a few classes that are still more or less identified almost exclusively with a particular semantic class. These include class 1/2 (humans), class 11 (abstracts), 14 (verb nouns) and 16/17/18 (locatives). The rest of the classes relate to non humans.

It is worth noting that lexicographers, both non-Africans and Africans, have been faithful to the native speaker's use of Kiswahili in their entries on classes 1/2, MU1/WA, whereas it is Bantu grammarians and linguists who have systematically excluded their evidence from the writing of grammar books and learned papers (Johnson, 1939b; Sacleux, 1939; TUKI, 1981, 2004; Issak, 1999; Kirkeby, 2000).

4. On the Status of *Mtoto wa Bandia* 'doll' in Kiswahili Classes 1/2, MU1/WA

Let us compare how native speakers use classes 1/2 of Kiswahili grammar with how Kiswahilists, Bantuists, and linguists say they should use classes 1/2. One of the examples found in the works of Zaidi, Kamal Khan, Saidi and Chiraghdin (1972, p. 45), and cited in Amidu (1997, p. 217), is reproduced below.

(1) "Akaanza kuchezea watoto wake wa bandia alikuwa amewaweka

mle kisandukuni.”

Cl. 1 SM-NARRATIVE-begin-MOD (PRO+T)-play-APPL-MOD Cl. 2
 -child Cl. 2 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/3 OM Cl. 2-of Cl. 9-fake Cl. 1
 SM-PAST-Cl. 2 ORM-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 1 SM-RECENT
 PAST-Cl. 2 OM-put-MOD Cl. 17c/26c-that little box-Cl. 17/26

'She began to play with her dolls which she had put in the little box.'

The literal gloss is my work and does not appear in Amidu (1997). In (1), we are told that a child is playing with her dolls, *watoto wake wa bandia*. Dolls are inanimate objects, but the nominal class of the NP in Kiswahili Bantu is class 2 WA. *Watoto wa bandia* 'dolls' differs, for example, from *watoto wa paka* 'kittens, lit. children of a cat'. We observe in the above example that the Waswahili differentiate between a 'child' as an animate object and a 'child', i.e. doll, as an inanimate object and they do all this in classes 1/2, MU1 and WA.

When we turn to Kiswahilists, Bantuists and linguists, we discover that they describe classes 1/2 as human or animate classes or gender, or both, in which there are no inanimate denoting terms. The evidence above shows, however, that native speakers are able to differentiate between the meanings [+animate] and [-animate] in the use of the lexical nouns *mtoto/watoto* 'lit. child/children' of classes 1/2 without changing the classes of the words. To illustrate our point clearly, let us examine (1) in a little more detail. The serial PC *aliokuwa amewaveka* 'lit. (they) which she had put them' in (1) consists of V1 *aliokuwa* and V2 *amewaveka*. The PC is a relativized predicate whose object NP is *watoto wake wa bandia* located in preverbal position. Observe that the object NP generates an object relative marker (ORM) {o} of class 2 WA in V1 and an object marker (OM) {wa} of class 2 WA in V2. The object agreement concords {o} and {wa} underscore the fact that the inanimate denoting NP *watoto wake wa bandia* 'dolls' belongs in classes 1/2. The singular form of (1) is (2).

(2) *A-ka-anz-a ku-chez-e-a m-toto w-a-ke w-a bandia
 a-li-ye-kuwa a-me-m-wek-a m-le kisanduku-ni.*

Cl. 1 SM-NARRATIVE-begin-MOD (PRO+T)-play-APPL-MOD
 Cl. 1-child Cl. 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/3 OM Cl. 1-of Cl.
 9-fake Cl. 1 SM-PAST-Cl. 1 ORM-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 1
 SM-RECENT PAST-Cl. 1 OM-put-MOD Cl. 17c/26c-that little
 box-Cl. 17/26

'She began to play with her doll which she had put in the little box.'

In (2), the child is playing with her doll, *mtoto wake wa bandia*. The doll is an inanimate object, but the nominal class of the NP in Kiswahili is class 1 MUI. Observe that the serial PC *aliyekuwa amemweka* 'lit. (it) which she had put it' is a relativized predicate whose object NP is *mtoto wake wa bandia* in preverbal position. Observe further that the object NP generates an ORM {ye} of class 1 in V1 and an OM {m} of class 1 in V2. Here too, the OMs underline the fact that the inanimate denoting NP *mtoto wake wa bandia* belongs to classes 1/2. As a result of its singular (and plural) inflections, *Mtoto wa bandia* or *mtoto wake wa bandia* cannot be said to belong to another class such as class 3 MU2 of the grammar, unless one perhaps wishes to be trivial.

Another feature of the data above is that the PCs are transitive and passivize as (3)-(4).

(3) *A-ka-anz-a ku-chez-e-a wa-toto wa-ke w-a bandia
 wa-li-o-ku-w-a wa-me-wek-w-a m-le kisanduku-ni.*

Cl. 1 SM-NARRATIVE-begin-MOD (PRO+T)-play-APPL-MOD
 Cl. 2-child Cl. 2 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/3 OM Cl. 2-of Cl.
 9-fake Cl. 2 SM-PAST-Cl. 2 SRM-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 2
 SM-RECENT PAST-put- PASS-MOD Cl. 17c/26c-that little
 box-Cl. 17/26

'She began to play with her dolls which had been put in the little box.'

(4) *A-ka-anz-a ku-chez-e-a m-toto wa-ke w-a bandia
 a-li-ye-ku-w-a a-me-wek- w-a m-le kisanduku-ni.*

Cl. 1 SM-NARRATIVE-begin-MOD (PRO+T)-play-APPL-MOD Cl.

1-child Cl. 1 SM-COP 'A'-PossProCl. 1/3 OM Cl. 1-of Cl. 9-fake Cl.
 1 SM-PAST-Cl. 1 SRM-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 1 SM-RECENT
 PAST-put-PASS-MOD Cl. 17c/26c-that little box-Cl. 17/26
 'She began to play with her doll which had been put in the little box.'

The subject NP of the serial PC *waliokuwa wamewekwa* 'they which had been put' in (3) is *watoto wake wa bandia* 'her dolls'. It generates both a subject marker (SM) {wa} and a subject relative marker (SRM) {o} of class 2 WA in V1 *waliokuwa* 'they were' and generates SM {wa} in V2 *wamewekwa* 'they were put' of the PC. The voice of the PC is passive with the passive morpheme {w} visible in V2 *wamewekwa*. The subject NP of the serial PC *aliyekuwa amewekwa* 'it which had been put' in (4) is *mtoto wake wa bandia* 'her doll'. It generates both SM {a} and SRM {ye} of class 1 MU1 in V1 *aliyekuwa* 'it was' and generates SM {a} in V2 *amewekwa* 'it was put' of the PC. The voice of the PC is also passive.

So far then our illustration establishes that *mtoto/watoto* are polysemic nouns that may be used to speak about animate and inanimate objects in Kiswahili classes 1/2, MU1 and WA. Because of this, a generalization to the effect that classes 1/2, MU1 and WA, in Kiswahili Bantu are exclusively human or almost exclusively so or do not contain inanimate objects of any kind reveals that the writer lacks native speaker sophistication in the analysis of the semantic concepts underlying the Bantu classes. Likewise, a generalization to the effect that, besides classes 1/2, all other classes are non animate or non-human, or both, is self evidently false and lacks native speaker sophistication in the use of Bantu classes (Amidu, 2003, 2007). For example, there are words like *mtume* 'prophet', class 3 MU2, *jirani* 'neighbour', class 5 JI, *kijitu* 'dwarf', class 7 KI, *askari* 'soldier/s', classes 9 NI1 and 10 NI2, and so on, in Kiswahili Bantu. Lastly, given (1), a native speaker will derive (2), and vice versa, given (2), he or she will derive (1) without hesitation or difficulty. The evidence above suggests that neither *watoto wake wa bandia* nor *mtoto wake wa bandia*, nor both, belongs to classes 3/4, MU2/MI, of the grammar,

namely the so called 'plant' or 'arboreal' classes.

(5) is an objective question in Zaidi, Kamal Khan, Saidi and Chiraghdin (1972, p. 47).

(5) "Mtoto wa bandia ni:

- a) mtoto wa mchezo ambaye pia huitwa *mwanasesere*
- b) mtoto mchanga
- c) mtoto wa paka
- d) mtoto yatima."

'A doll is:

- a) a play toy which is also called *mwanasesere*
- b) a young child
- c) a kitten
- d) an orphan.'

The correct answer is (a). It translates into English as 'a play toy (lit. a play child) which is also called a *doll*.' *Mwanasesere* therefore means a 'doll' or 'toy doll'. It is glossed with its plural as (6)-(7) below.

(6) *M-toto w-a m-chezo amba-ye pia hu-it-w-a mw-anasesere.*

Cl. 1-child Cl. 1-of Cl. 3-play COP-say-Cl. 1 SRM Cl. 0-also Cl. 1 \emptyset -HABITUAL-call-PASS-MOD Cl. 1-*mwanasesere*

'A toy (lit. play child) which is also called *mwanasesere*, i.e. a doll.'

(7) *Wa-toto w-a m-chezo amba-o pia hu-it-w-a w-anasesere.*

Cl. 2-child Cl. 2-of Cl. 3-play COP-say-Cl. 2 SRM Cl. 0-also Cl. 2 \emptyset -HABITUAL-call-PASS-MOD Cl. 2-*wanasesere*

'Toys (lit. play children) which are also called *wanasesere*, i.e. dolls.'

Observe that the subject NP of the PC *ambaye huitwa* 'which is called' in (6) is *mtoto wa mchezo* 'toy, lit. play child' of class 1 MUI. The plural subject NP in (7) is *watoto wa mchezo* 'toys (lit. play children)' of class 2 WA and its PC is *ambao huitwa* 'which are

called'. Both PCs in (6)-(7) are in the passive voice. Observe further that the SRM attached to the copula AMBA 'say' is {ye} of class 1 MUI in (6) and {o} of class 2 WA in (7). The habitual tense is {hu} in the PCs. In Kiswahili, the presence of {hu} blocks the visibility of SM in a PC. If one wishes the SM to be overtly visible, then one must replace the habitual tense {hu} with, for example, the present tense {na} or the indefinite tense {a}. The PC would then be *anaitwa* 'it is called' or *aitwa* 'it is (always) called' instead of *huitwa* 'it is (usually) called' in (6), on the one hand, and *wanaitwa* 'they are called' or *waitwa* 'they are (always) called' instead of *huitwa* 'they are (usually) called' in (7), on the other hand. The SMs in the passive PC *ambaye pia anaitwa* 'which is also called' or *ambaye pia aitwa* 'which is also always called' would then also be SM {a} and SRM {ye} of class 1 MUI. The SMs in the passive PC *ambao pia wanaitwa* 'which are also called' or *ambao pia waitwa* 'which are also always called' would also be SM {wa} and SRM {o} of class 2 WA. Note the following sound changes, namely SM {a} + indefinite tense {a} --> {a}, with the loss of a mora and SM {wa} + indefinite tense {a} --> {wa}, with the loss of a mora.

In (6)-(7), we discover that the NPs *mtoto wa mchezo* and *watoto wa mchezo* headed by *mtoto/watoto* refer to inanimate denoting entities in classes 1/2, MUI/WA. They also have classes 1/2 inflections and concords. *Mwanasesere/wanasesere* 'doll/s' are synonyms of the NPs above and occur in classes 1/2. Note that the NPs function as subject NPs of their passive PCs without difficulty. The evidence confirms that classes 1/2 of Kiswahili Bantu have no *horror vacui* syndrome for inanimate and animate terms. Once more, the evidence does not support assertions to the effect that classes 1/2 are exclusively human denoting classes or gender or exclusively animate denoting classes or gender in Kiswahili or Bantu. And yet, the writings and classifications of grammarians and linguists tend to portray mother-tongue speakers of Kiswahili who know the idiom of their language as the ones who, despite their protestations to the contrary, do not know how to speak and use their own language.

5. On the Status of *Mtoto wa Meza* 'drawer' in Kiswahili records

In Johnson (1939a, p. 166), we find the following entry:

(8) "**drawer**, n. (of a table) *mtoto wa meza*; (of chest of drawers) *saraka, mtoto*; [...] *Chest of drawers, almari, sanduku (kabati) lenye watoto.*"

In (8), the plural inflection for *mtoto wa meza* 'drawer' in Kiswahili is *watoto wa meza*. We know this from the NP *chest of drawers* in (8) which is described in Kiswahili as meaning *almari* or *sanduku (kabati) lenye watoto*. The last phrase *sanduku (kabati) lenye watoto* literally means 'box (cupboard) having children'. Thus *mtoto* 'drawer' inflects for plural as *watoto* when it mean 'drawers'. These senses are [-animate]. In addition to this, *mtoto/watoto* have their primary senses 'child/children' with the feature [+animate]. *Mtoto* and *watoto* are therefore semantically [+animate] denoting nouns and their NPs are similarly [+animate] denoting NPs. The primary and secondary meanings of the nouns are given by Johnson (1939b, p. 310) as follows:

Mtoto, n. *wa* implies generally what is (A) in an early stage of development, or (B) in a subordinate position and includes the following meanings. A child, young person, offspring, offshoot, descendant, [...] For offshoot of plants cf. *watoto wa mgomba*, the young shoots springing from the roots of a banana plant. [...] (2) *mtoto* is also extended to inanimate objects of all sorts, whose function is of a subordinate kind, such as motor car trailer, [...] but in this case it is sometimes treated as a *mi-* noun, i.e. with plural *mitoto*, e.g. *mtoto wa meza*, the drawer of a table [...]

In Johnson's entry above, *mtoto* 'child, offshoot, component' is a noun of class 1 MU1 that inflects as *watoto* in class 2 WA. We learn from the entry that *mtoto wa meza* 'table drawer' inflects as *watoto wa meza* in the plural, even though "it is sometimes treated as a *mi*

noun, i.e. with plural *mitoto* [...]” Thus the preferred inflection occurs in classes 1/2, MU1/WA.

Note that all dictionaries produced after (1939) make no reference to the possible inflectional pair *mtoto wa meza/mitoto ya meza* of classes 3/4. We will only give four examples from recent dictionaries and let the reader check the rest for himself or herself. Lodhi and Otterbrandt (1987, p. 125) have the following entry: “*Mtoto* (*wa*) barn, avkomning (se *utoto*; jfr *kitoto*, *mwana*), ~ *wa meza* bordslåda.” This translates as ‘[...] child, offspring (see *utoto*, refer to *kitoto*, *mwana*), *mtoto wa meza* drawer.’ Note that the Swedish word *bordslåda* means ‘drawer’. Issak (1999, p. 187) writes, “*Mtoto wa meza wa skuff*.” The Norwegian word *skuff* above means ‘drawer’, hence *mtoto/watoto wa meza* means ‘drawer/s’. Kirkeby (2000, p. 286) has the entry, “Drawer [...] n. [...] 4. droo (); *mtoto* (*wa*) *wa meza*; [...]” and TUKI (2001, p. 228) also has the entry “*Mtoto nm wa* [a /wa] 1. child, (Kiskoti) bairn. 2. young person. 3. ~ *wa jicho* cataract. 4. inset: ~ *wa meza* table drawer. [...]” Observe that, in all the data above, the inflection for *mtoto wa meza* in the plural is always *watoto wa meza* of class 2 WA. There is no record of *mtoto/mitoto* (see also TUKI, 1981, p. 197, 2004, p. 284). Observe that TUKI (2001) in its entry gives not only the inflection *mtoto/watoto* of classes 1/2 but also specifies the SMs used in predicate verbs clearly as class 1 {a} in the singular and class 2 {wa} in the plural.

According to the entries above, (9)–(10) below are idiomatic Kiswahili Pn–Ss.

(9) *M-toto w-a meza a-me-angu-k-a*.

Cl.1-child Cl. 1-of Cl. 9-table Cl. 1 SM-RECENT PAST-fall-STATIVE- MOD
‘The drawer has fallen.’

(10) *Wa-toto w-a meza wa-me-angu-k-a*.

Cl. 2-child Cl. 2-of Cl. 9-table Cl. 2 SM-RECENT PAST-fall-STATIVE- MOD
‘The drawers have fallen.’

Observe that the SMs in the PCs *ameanguka* (9) and *wameanguka*

(10) are again {a} and {wa} of classes 1/2. Compare (9)-(10) with (11)-(12) below.

(11) *M-toto w-a meza u-me-angu-k-a.*

Cl. 3-child Cl. 3-of Cl. 9-table Cl. 3 SM-RECENT PAST-fall-STATIVE-MOD

'The drawer has fallen.'

(12) *Mi-toto y-a meza i-me-angu-k-a.*

Cl. 4-child Cl. 4-of Cl. 9-table Cl. 4 SM-RECENT PAST-fall-STATIVE-MOD

'The drawers have fallen.'

(11)-(12) are less idiomatic than (9)-(10) in Kiswahili, but they are preferred by some native speakers. The SMs in the PCs *umeanguka* and *imeanguka* of (11)-(12) are {u} and {i} of classes 3/4, MU2/MI. Note further that (11) appears in Amidu (1997, p. 164) and it is preferred by Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi of Uppsala University, a native speaker from Zanzibar. Abdulaziz Y. Lodhi's preference for class 3 SM {u} in the PC is surprising because in the dictionary produced by him and Tommy Otterbrandt above, we only find *mtoto/watoto* of classes 1/2 but not *mtoto/mitoto* of classes 3/4. Their entry suggests strongly that *mtoto wa meza* inflects for plural in class 2 WA but not in classes 4 MI. The evidence reveals that what native speakers say they say may not be what they actually write down formally. Whiteley (1968, p. 5) was the first to observe this conflict of usage among native speakers. Let us look at an example taken from Mnyupe (1989, p. 118).¹

(13) "Kwa ajili hiyo kiungo hiki hutumika kwa kuunga vipande vya mbao vya mbele ya pembeni vya watoto wa meza (*drawers*)."

Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) for Cl. 9-sake this-Cl. 9 'O' TOP Cl. 7-joint this-Cl. 7

¹) I am extremely grateful to Alf Skrove, a former postgraduate student of social anthropology at the University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway, for lending me his books on carpentry written in Kiswahili. He worked as a carpentry specialist at Kideleko Secondary School in Morogoro, Tanzania, before pursuing his current interests in the *Parakujo* people of Morogoro and Zanzibar. He was also at one time the teaching assistant of the Swahili Section of my department.

Cl. 7 \emptyset -HABITUAL-use-STATIVE-MOD Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) for
 (PRO+T)-join-MOD Cl. 8-piece Cl. 8-of Cl. 10 board Cl. 8-of Cl. 9-anterior
 Cl. 9-of corner-Cl. 17/26 Cl. 8-of Cl. 2-child Cl. 2-of Cl. 9-table (*drawers*)

'Because of this, this joint is used to join the front corner
 pieces of boards of drawers.'

Mnyupe (1989) is a specialist in carpentry and joinery. In (13), he uses the NP *watoto wa meza* 'table drawers' of class 2 WA, which is the plural of *mtoto wa meza* 'table drawer'.

6. Polysemy and Native Speaker Choice

In TUKI (2001) above, we find the entry *mtoto wa jicho* 'cataract' of class 1 MU1. Its plural is *watoto wa jicho* of class 2 WA. Cataracts may be viewed as [-animate] or [+animate] entities. Note also in Johnson's entry given above how the young shoot of plants inflect for agreement in classes 1/2, e.g. *mtoto wa mgomba/watoto wa mgomba* 'young banana shoot/s', *mtoto wa mwanzi/watoto wa mwanzi* 'young bamboo shoot/s', etc. (Amidu, 2003, pp. 105-107). They do not inflect in classes 3/4, MU2/MI, where nouns denoting their parent plants are located. This evidence is a major setback for semantic assignment rules of Bantu, to the extent that plants and their shoots inflect in different classes. One could, of course, argue that everything depends on what one defines as [+animate] in linguistics. Even so, I will be surprised if anyone were to argue that the parent plants are less animate than their shoots and this accounts for the shoots occurring in classes 1/2 with so-called animate entities while the parent plants occur in classes 3/4 with so called inanimate entities. What the evidence reveals is that semantic categorization in Bantu languages is not founded on philosophical or anthropological or logical or biobotanical postulates but on intra linguistic empirical semantic patterns of usage. Namely what there are in Bantu classes and in Bantu language usage are the materials that form the categorization frames of nouns. Thus certain shoots of plants and young plants inflect in classes 1/2, MU1/WA,

while their parents plants inflect in classes 3/4, but both share exactly the same semantic feature of animacy, namely [-animate], in the formal grammar. However, cataract, as a disease, is problematic. Even so, what we as linguists logically wish or think should be in Bantu classes is besides the point in linguistic semantic categorization. Bantu class grammar has its own categorization frames, and we ought to respect this and bring it to the attention of science rather than prescribe to mother tongue speakers how they should speak, write and categorize their language against their wishes and their own categorization frames.

On animacy, consider, for example, Corbett (1991). Corbett (1991, p. 3) writes that his study "will also show how divisions into animate and inanimate, or human and non human, function in language exactly as does the division into female and male." Recall that, on page 48 of his work, he writes that "Note that gender 1/2 is a purely semantic gender, containing only animates [...]" Further on, on page 257, Corbett writes that, "We saw how in Bantu the rule that nouns denoting humans will be in gender 1/2 is being extended in several languages to include all animates (human and non human)." The term 'animate' is used, therefore, by Corbett (1991) to refer to human and non human but excluding parts of plants or their offshoots or cataracts. Thus, no mention is made in Corbett's work of the types of young and shoot of plants or cataracts that occur in the so called animate gender or classes 1/2 (Amidu, 2003, pp. 105-107). It appears then that the young and shoot of plants as well as cataracts referred to above do not fall within the linguistic definition of the contrast [+animate] versus [-animate] in Bantu grammars in spite of their patterns of inflection and agreement marking in Kiswahili Bantu syntax. In this way, traditional Bantu grammarians and linguists arrived and still arrive at their exclusive ideal animate classes 1/2, MU1/WA, for Bantu by keeping quiet about vital evidence. Alternatively, they defend their approach by appealing to exceptions and are thus able to exclude evidence that falsify their central claims. Unbeknown to them, they have created a problem of classification in Bantu. Namely, if classes 1/2 are exclusively human or animate classes, then the young and shoot of

plants and cataracts found in the same classes must be anomalies in the so called animate gender classes 1/2. This is because one cannot say that the parents are [-animate] entities and claim thereafter that their offsprings or shoots are [+animate] entities. Note that even the use of terms like 'living objects' by Bantuists and linguists to describe nouns of classes 1/2 is not helpful in resolving the paradox, as we shall see shortly.

The difficulty for Kiswahili and Bantu grammarians and linguists over the years is that having come to an *a priori* conclusion that gender or classes 1/2, MU1/WA, are exclusively human and/or animate classes, they find themselves caught in a trap in which they cannot turn round and say that the young and shoot of plants and cataracts are [+animate], even if they are [+live]. This is because to do so will require that they conclude, for example, that parent plants are also [+animate] living objects, hence [+live]. Such a reclassification would defeat their traditional classifications in which the parent plants are classified in classes 3/4, MU2/MI. This is because they describe classes 3/4 as [-animate] classes or genders consisting of non living objects with the feature [-live]. Note how the binary features used by linguists potentially self contradict each other in Bantu at this point. That is, in the above case, the features make the parent plants [-animate] in classes 3/4 even though they are bearers of shoots or young ones in so-called exclusively [+animate] classes 1/2. Is such a parent child animacy relationship possible? The answer may lie in biology and botany.

As a result of the difficulties above, Amidu (2003) takes the view that the young and shoot of plants in classes 1/2 are [-animate, -human] linguistically. Biobotanically, however, a thing can be [-animate] in the linguistic sense and still be [+live] in the scientific sense of enzymes, microbes, *et alia*. The NP *mtoto wa jicho* 'cataract' is just such an example. But whatever it is, the young and shoot of plants such as *mtoto wa mwanzi/watoto wa mwanzi* 'young bamboo shoot/s', and cataract/s, i.e. *mtoto/watoto wa jicho*, inflect in classes 1/2, whether or not one argues that they are more [+animate] in a biobotanical sense

than their parents.

We conclude, therefore, that the biobotanic sense of [\pm animate] plays no role in determining the semantic feature rules of Bantu. As a result, restrictions of classes 1/2 to [+animate] and/or [+human], as found in Ashton (1947, pp. 10, 29), Corbett (1991, pp. 48, 257), and Mkude (2005, p. 127) are inadequate semantic categorizations rules in Kiswahili Bantu (Amidu, 1997, 2003).

7. Depreciative or Pejorative uses of *Mtoto/Mitoto* of Classes 3/4

Sacleux (1939, p. 615) states that classes 3/4, *mtoto/mitoto*, may be used pejoratively. Consider, in this regard, the datum below from Ngahyoma (1973, p. 8).

(14) "NGAHINYANA: Mitoto ya siku hizi sijui kwa nini imekuwa mipumbavu namna hii."

'NGAHINYANA: Cl. 4-child Cl. 4-of Cl. 10-day this-Cl. 10 NEG-ProCl. 1 / 1 SM-know-PRESENT NEG-MOD Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) for Cl. 9-what Cl. 4 SM-RECENT PAST-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 4-foolish Cl. 9-manner this-Cl. 9

'NGAHINYANA: Children/little fellows of today, I cannot understand why they are so stupid, lit. children/little fellows of today, I cannot understand why they are stupid like this.'

When (14) is put into the singular inflection, we get (15).

(15) *NGAHINYANA: M-toto w-a siku hi-zi si-ju-i kwa nini u-me-ku-w-a m-pumbavu namna hi-i.*

NGAHINYANA: Cl. 3-child Cl. 3-of Cl. 10-day this-Cl. 10 NEG-ProCl. 1/1 SM-know-PRESENT NEG-MOD Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) for Cl. 9-what Cl. 3 SM-RECENT PAST-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 3-foolish Cl. 9-manner this-Cl. 9

'NGAHINYANA: A child/little fellow of today, I cannot understand why it is so stupid, lit. a child/little fellow of today,

I cannot understand why it is stupid like this.'

Observe that *mtoto/mitoto* in (14)-(15) belong to classes 3/4, MU2/MI, and their SMs in the PCs *umekuwa* 'it has become' and *imekuwa* 'they have become' are {u} and {i}. Even so, they are [+animate] denoting entities exactly like the primary senses of *mtoto/watoto* in classes 1/2, MU1/WA. In the examples above, Ngahinyana is being sarcastic when uses the term *mitoto* of class 4 MI. His contempt for his daughter and her behaviour can be inferred from his choice of noun. The selection of *mitoto*, however, carries no denotational advantages. It only brings to bear on the speech message a connotative meaning of depreciation and contempt (Nida, 1975).

8. Toto/Matoto in Classes 5/6, JI/MA1

In Kiswahili Bantu, classes 5/6, JI/MA1, may also express a variety of meanings and provide the speaker with alternatives to classes 1/2 *mtoto/watoto* and 3/4 *mtoto/mitoto*. In Johnson (1939b, p. 311), we find the following entry:

- (16) "*Toto*, n. *ma-* ampic. like *mtoto*, but commonly either (1) of size, a big, fine child; or (2) of some object resembling a child or offspring, e.g. *toto la ndizi*, the fruit bud on the banana stalk; *toto la meza*, the drawer of a table."

Note how *toto/matoto* may be used to refer to buds of fruits and components like table drawers. We find an augmentative use of *toto/matoto* 'big component' in school books from Zanzibar in the extract below from Wizara ya Elimu Zanzibar (1980, p. 50):

- (17) "'Tena", mjomba akaongeza, "Ilikuwa ikikokota matoto au kwa jina jingine mabehewa 5 yenye kuchukua mizigo na abiria".
 "'And then", my uncle added, "it used to pull along compartments or as it is called by another name carriages, 5 in

all, which carried goods and passengers”.’

The speaker is referring to a train of Zanzibar railways. We write the relevant part more clearly and maximally as (18) and with the singular of *matoto* in (19).

- (18) *Reli i-li-ku-w-a i-ki-koko-t-a ma-toto au kwa ji-na ji-ngine ma-behewa 5 y- enye kuchuku-a mi-zigo na abiria.*

Cl. 9-train Cl. 9 SM-PAST-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 9 SM-PAST-drag- CONTACTIVE-MOD Cl. 6-child Cl. 0-or Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) by Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-other Cl. 6-carriage Cl. 6-five Cl. 6-having (PRO+T)-carry-MOD Cl. 4-load Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) and Cl. 10/2-passenger

‘The train used to pull along compartments or as it is called by another name carriages, 5 in all, which carried goods and passengers.’

- (19) *Reli i-li-ku-w-a i-ki-koko-t-a toto au kwa ji-na ji-ngine behewa l-enye kuchuku-a mi-zigo na abiria.*

Cl. 9-train Cl. 9 SM-PAST-STRESS AFX-be-MOD Cl. 9 SM-PAST-drag- CONTACTIVE-MOD Cl. 5-child Cl. 0-or Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) by Cl. 5-name Cl. 5-other Cl. 5-carriage Cl. 5-having (PRO+T)-carry-MOD Cl. 4-load Cl. 0 \emptyset -COP-(be) and Cl. 10/2-passenger

‘The train used to pull along a compartment or as it is called by another name a carriage, which carried goods and passengers.’

Observe that the VPs *ilikuwa ikikokota toto* ‘it use to pull a carriage’ and *ilikuwa ikikokota matoto* ‘it used to pull carriages’ are transitive and passivize easily as *toto lilikuwa likikototwa* ‘a compartment used to be pulled along’ and *matoto yalikuwa yakikokotwa* ‘compartments used be pulled along’. *Toto/matoto* also have [+animate] uses as the following phrases illustrate.

- (20) *Toto zuri l-a dunia.*

- Cl. 5-child Cl. 5-beautiful Cl. 5-of Cl. 9-world
'Beauty queen of the world.'
- (21) *Ma-toto ma-zuri y-a dunia.*
Cl. 6-child Cl. 6-beautiful Cl. 6-of Cl. 9-world
'Beauty queens of the world.'

(20) is from Shafi (1999, p. 63) and (21) is its plural inflection.

9. Conclusion

The evidence in this study underscores our claim that Bantu grammarians need to take account of polysemy and mother tongue knowledge in the writing of their works. I have stressed that {m} and {wa} are the sophisticated idiomatic inflections for *mtoto/watoto* in Kiswahili language and are used to express [\pm animate] senses of the NPs in classes 1/2. This suggests that polysemy and semantic extension allow animate denoting NPs in the various Bantu classes to have non animate and other meanings besides their common denotations. This is especially true in noun plus modifier relationships in Kiswahili Bantu syntax (Amidu, 2007). Except for Amidu (1997, 2003, 2007), the way modifiers of nouns change the meanings of nouns in terms of animacy has not been studied and explored since the first grammar of 1850 came out. It is time to encourage more studies in this area of Kiswahili syntax and semantics.

In conclusion, I stress two things. Firstly, the use of the nouns *mtoto/watoto* as [\pm animate] is not triggered by exceptional principles of any type or by a 'Trojan horse' or principle of personification (Lakoff, 1986; Dixon, 1982; Corbett, 1991, p. 257; Amidu, 1997, pp. 213-215, 228-229). Choice would explain why and how some natives speakers sometimes, but not always, prefer inflections in classes 3/4, e.g. *mtoto wa meza* 'drawer' versus *mitoto ya meza* 'drawers', or classes 5/6 *toto la meza* '(big) drawer' versus *matoto ya meza* '(big) drawers', or classes 7/8 *kitoto cha meza* 'small drawer' versus *vitoto uya meza* 'small drawers'.

Secondly, I have illustrated, in this study, how grammarians and linguists of Kiswahili and Bantu tend to ignore mother tongue speakers in writing grammars and learned works about what constitutes idiomatic and sophisticated Kiswahili usage. They seem to believe that their own non native speaker judgements and intuitions about usage override those of mother tongue speakers. We have seen, however, that, for mother tongue speakers of Kiswahili Bantu, *mtoto/watoto* of classes 1/2 are both [+animate] and [-inanimate] denoting nouns. Thus, if grammarians and linguists continue to argue that native speakers are wrong about their use of Kiswahili so that their own versions or renditions of what is sophisticated Kiswahili usage will be accepted as part of Standard Kiswahili, then whatever their claims to erudition might be, they will be doing Kiswahili as well as learners and scholars of Kiswahili incalculable linguistic harm. At worst, it could trigger a major reaction against Standard Kiswahili itself in the future.² Knowledge of the use of a language is always the province of its native speakers.

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²) Alf Skrove in his email to me, dated 21st January 2007, writes that,

I have not used those books for more than ten years, and I am not able to see any situation in the near future where I will be in need of them. [...] While working in Kideleko Sec. School I was in charge of constructing a new building with two big class rooms and a teacher's room. Each teacher was to have his own desk with two drawers, - 16 pieces of furniture. I distributed the work to several *fundis*, and I remember that the only two expressions that were used for drawers were either *madawati* or *watoto wa meza*. The last one being the most common.

I do believe that experiences like that of Alf Skrove acquired professionally in the field are worth taking into account in describing Kiswahili classes. *Fundi* of class 5 JI means 'skilled workman' with plural *mafundi* of class 6 MA1 in Kiswahili Bantu. Note that Alf Skrove suffixes the English plural marker [s] to the end of *fundi* hence *fundis* in his email.

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