Researching morphosyntactic variation in Swahili

REEDStalks lecture series

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Overview

1. Introduction

2. The project

3. Language attitudes and sociolinguistic findings

4. Morphosyntactic variation

5. Summary and discussion

Bantu languages

- 350-600 languages

- 350 million+ speakers

- Spoken in 27+ countries

- Examples: Swahili, Zulu, Bemba, Luganda, Chichewa

- Assumed to have originated from area around present-day Nigeria/Cameroon approx. 3000 years ago

Introduction

- Bantu languages exhibit a range of broad typological similarities, but also show a high degree of micro-variation

- Significantly improved descriptive status of Bantu languages has made large-scale comparative studies of morphosyntactic variation feasible in recent years (e.g. Marten 2018, Bostoen et al. 2017)

- Parallel growth in research examining syntactic microvariation, including work on dialectal variation in European languages (e.g. REEDS network, affiliated projects and others)

- Including studies on microvariation and dialectal variation in Bantu languages (e.g. Bloom Ström ongoing on isiXhosa, Riedel & Gibson on Sesotho, Petzell et al. on East Ruvu languages, Tanzania)

Swahili
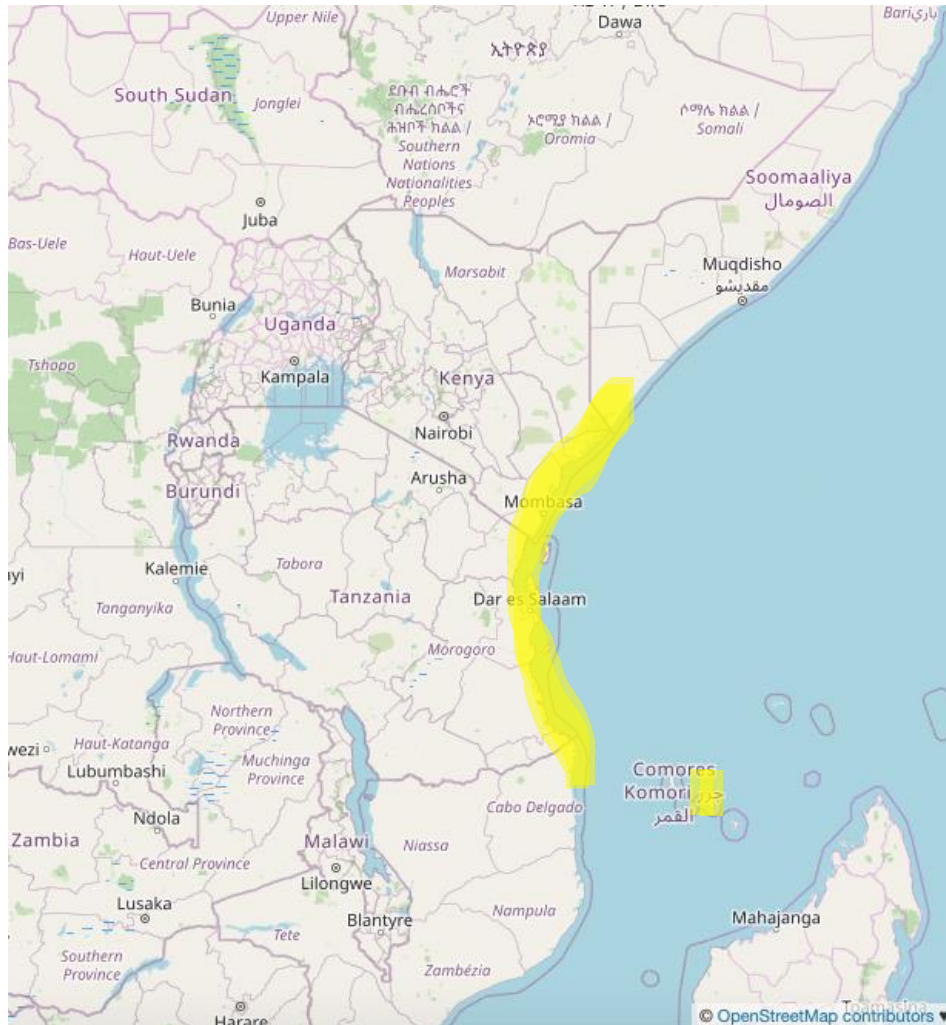
- Historically, first language of communities living along the 'Swahili Coast' (around 800 CE).

Swahili
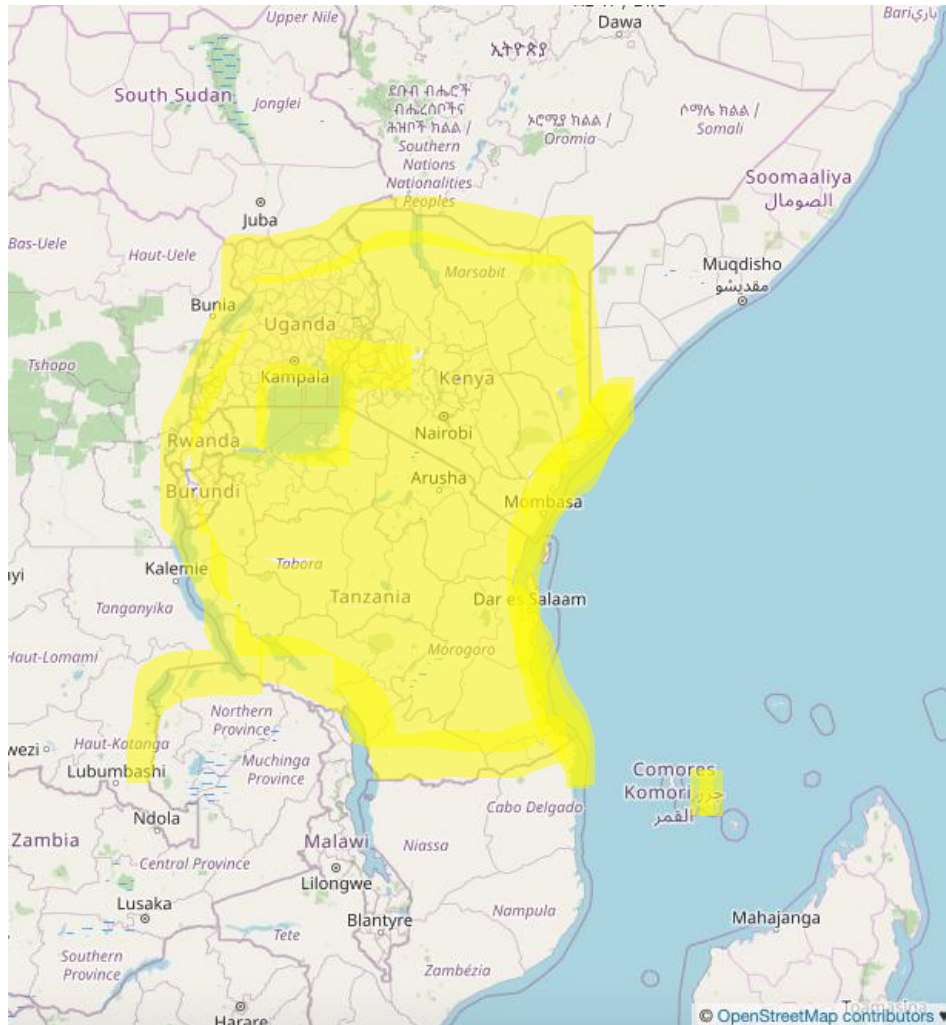
- Central role as a lingua franca across East Africa (Blommaert 2014, Mugane 2015).

- Importance in Indian Ocean commerce, and trade into central Africa.

- Now spoken by about 100m people in varied and multilingual contexts

Swahili

- Variation in Swahili has been historically noted primarily for phonology, morphology and the lexicon (e.g. Bakari 1985), less work on morphosyntax

- Coastal varieties and more established 'dialects' have been the main focus for the study of this variation (e.g. Stigand 1915)

- In recent years have seen increased interest in (micro)variation in Swahili (e.g. Shinagawa and Nassenstein 2019, Gibson et al.)

- However, no up-to-date account of variation in Swahili, and areas of (morpho)syntax remain under-examined

2. The Project

The project

Grammatical variation in Swahili: contact, change and identity

University of Essex, SOAS University of London, Kenyatta University (Kenya), University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania)

2021-2025

1) What is the present-day morphosyntactic variation found in Swahili?
2) What role does language contact play in the variation attested?
3) What is the relationship between structural variation in Swahili and the role language plays for the construction and negotiation of speakers' identity?
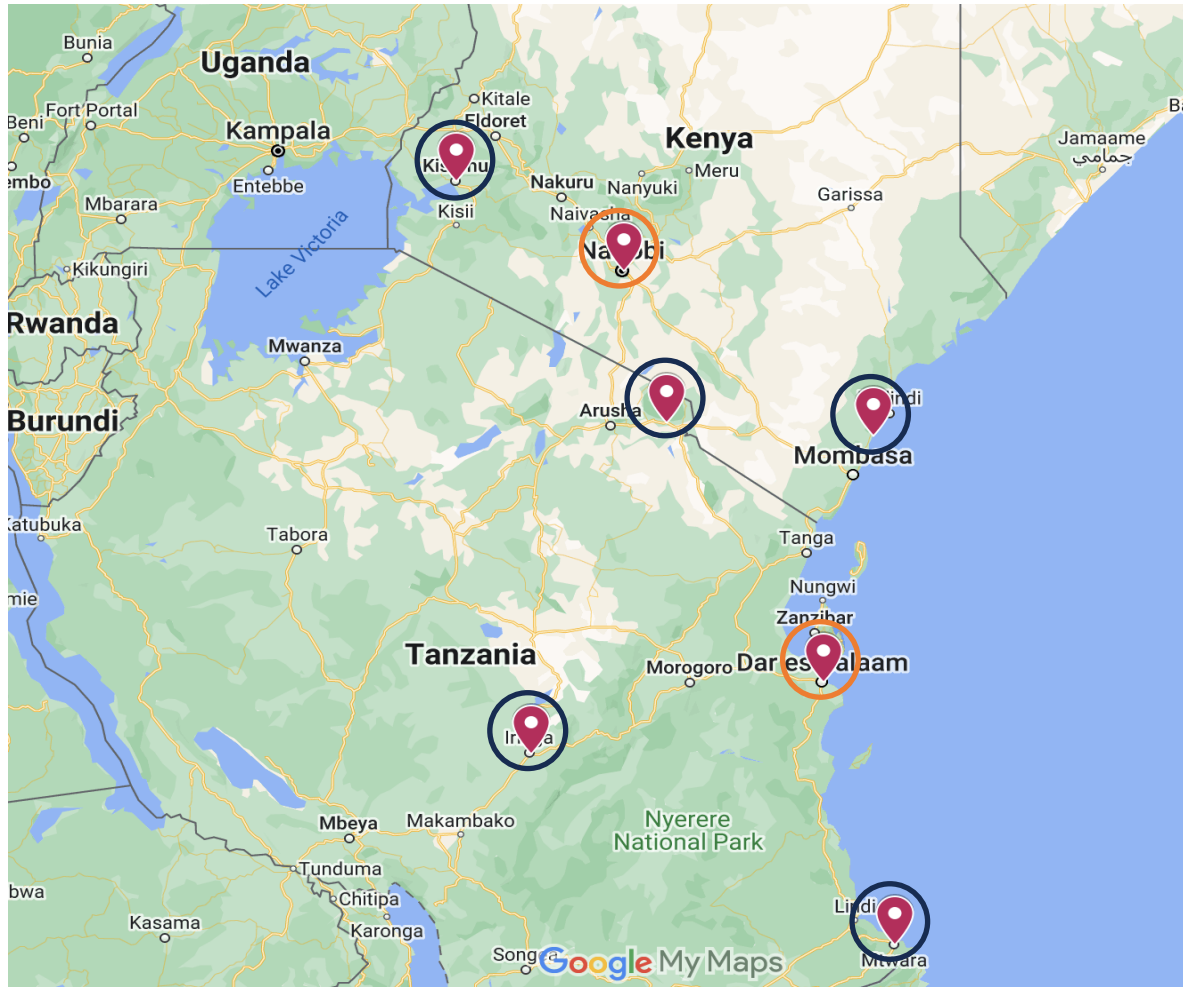
LEVERHULME TRUST

The project

- Hannah Gibson

- Fridah Kanana Erastus

- Julius Taji

- Lutz Marten

- Teresa Poeta

- Annah Kariuki

- Merceline Ochieng

- Felic Ngowo

- Godwin Akyoo

- Tom Jelpke

Data collection so far…

- Kisumu
- Nairobi
- Kilifi

- Moshi
- Iringa
- Dar es Salaam
- Mtwara

Methodology

- Multi-methods, triangulation
- Survey questionnaires
  - Perceptual Survey
  - Sociolinguistic Survey
  - Morphosyntactic Variation Survey
- Data Elicitation
- Focus groups
- Participant observation
- Ethnographic notes
- Audio and video recordings

Methodological considerations

- The project centres multilingualism and language contact as essential for understanding Swahili variation

- Presence of Standard Swahili – historically based on the dialect of Stone Town in Zanzibar

- Difference of socio-political histories between Kenya and Tanzania affect language policies, practices, attitudes and ideologies

- Starting point is quite different from variation projects working on better described languages and varieties

- Important to consider whether methodologies and sociolinguistic categories traditionally modelled on Global North language situations hold for the Swahili context

Methodology

English

Introduction

PERCEPTUAL DIALECTOLOGY SURVEY FOR SWAHILI

This survey is part of the research project
variation in Swahili: Contact, change and i
project is a collaboration between researd
Kenyatta University, SOAS University of Lon
University of Dar es Salaam and the Unive
and it is funded by the Leverhulme Trust. V

Swahili use and attitudes questionnaire
Designed as part of the Leverhulme Trust project "Grammatical variation in Swahili: contact, change and identity"
Version: 10 April 2023

Part 1: Demographics
Sehemu ya 1: Taarifa muhimu

1. Where were you born? (Please include region and/or district)
   Ulizaliwa wapi? (Tafadhali pia taja mkoa na/ au wilaya)

   _____

2. Where did you grow up? If you lived in multiple places or moved at any point, please list all the places.
   Ulikulia wapi? Kama uliishi maeneo tofauti tofauti au ulihama kutoka sehemu moja kwenda nyingine, tafadhali orodhesha maeneo hayo yote.

Features of morphosyntactic variation in Swahili

Morphosyntactic Questionnaire

Designed as part of the Leverhulme-funded project "Grammatical variation in Swahili: contact, change and identity"
University of Essex, SOAS University of London, Kenyatta University, University of Dar es Salaam

Alpha version, 1 June 2023

This is a questionnaire of morphosyntactic features that can be used to better understand variation in Swahili, with a focus on morphosyntax. The features are inspired by a combination of variation that has already been described for Swahili, variation that has been described across Bantu languages and variation found cross-linguistically.

The features relate to five key areas of grammar: nominal domain, verbal domain, tense-aspect-mood and negation, object marking and clausal syntax.

Overview of domains
   A. Nominal domain
   B. Verbal domain
   C. Tense, aspect, mood and negation
   D. Object marking
   E. Clausal syntax

For each question, we provide a short summary, some relevant examples and/or an
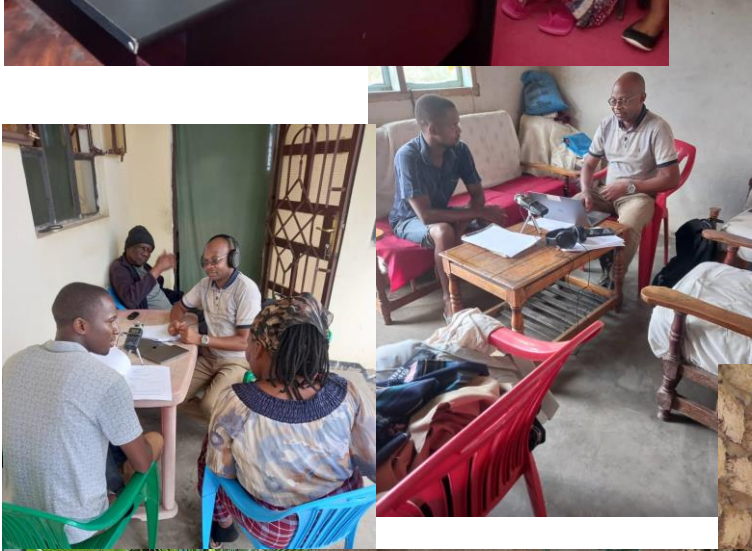
Working hypothesis

- Data seem to suggest a 4-way split in terms of dialect region

    1) Kenya mainland
    2) Tanzania mainland
    3) Coastal dialects
    4) Western Swahili dialects (DRC, Uganda, Rwanda, etc.)

- Supported by both sociolinguistic data (e.g. attitudes) and structural data (e.g. morphosyntactic variation)

- However, also micro- and macro-variation beyond these distinctions

Four main Swahili dialect areas
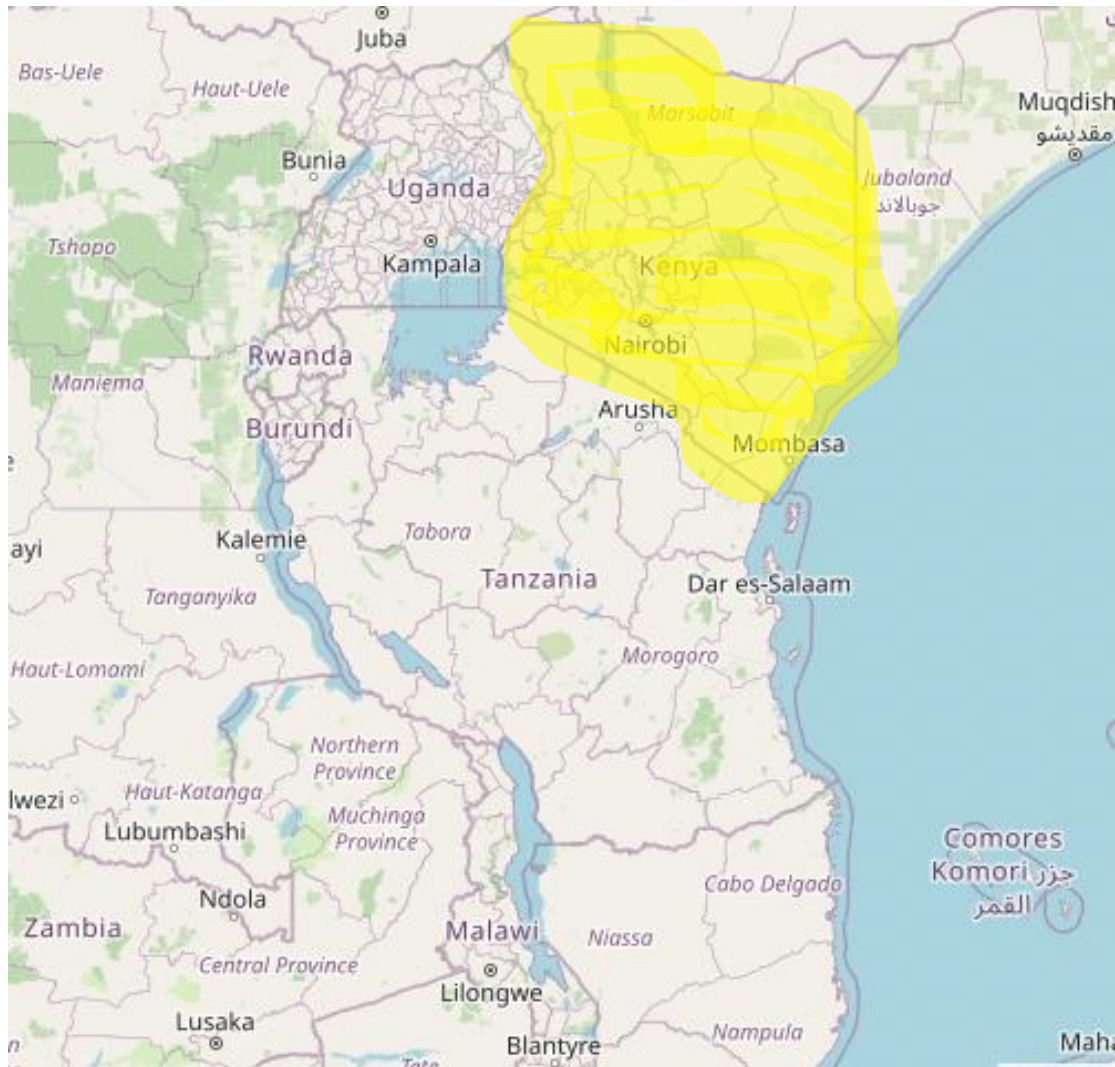
Four main Swahili dialect areas
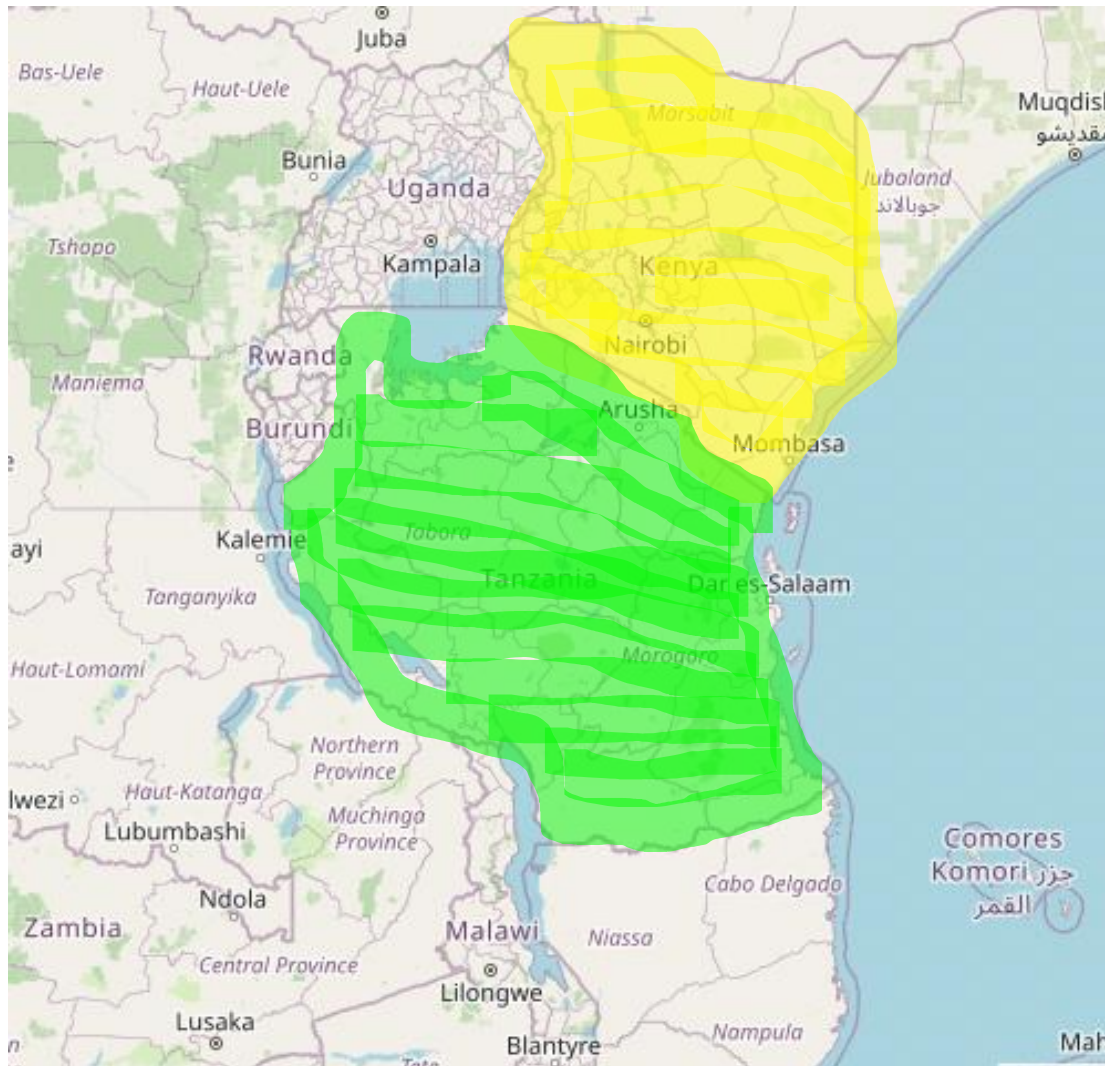
Four main Swahili dialect areas
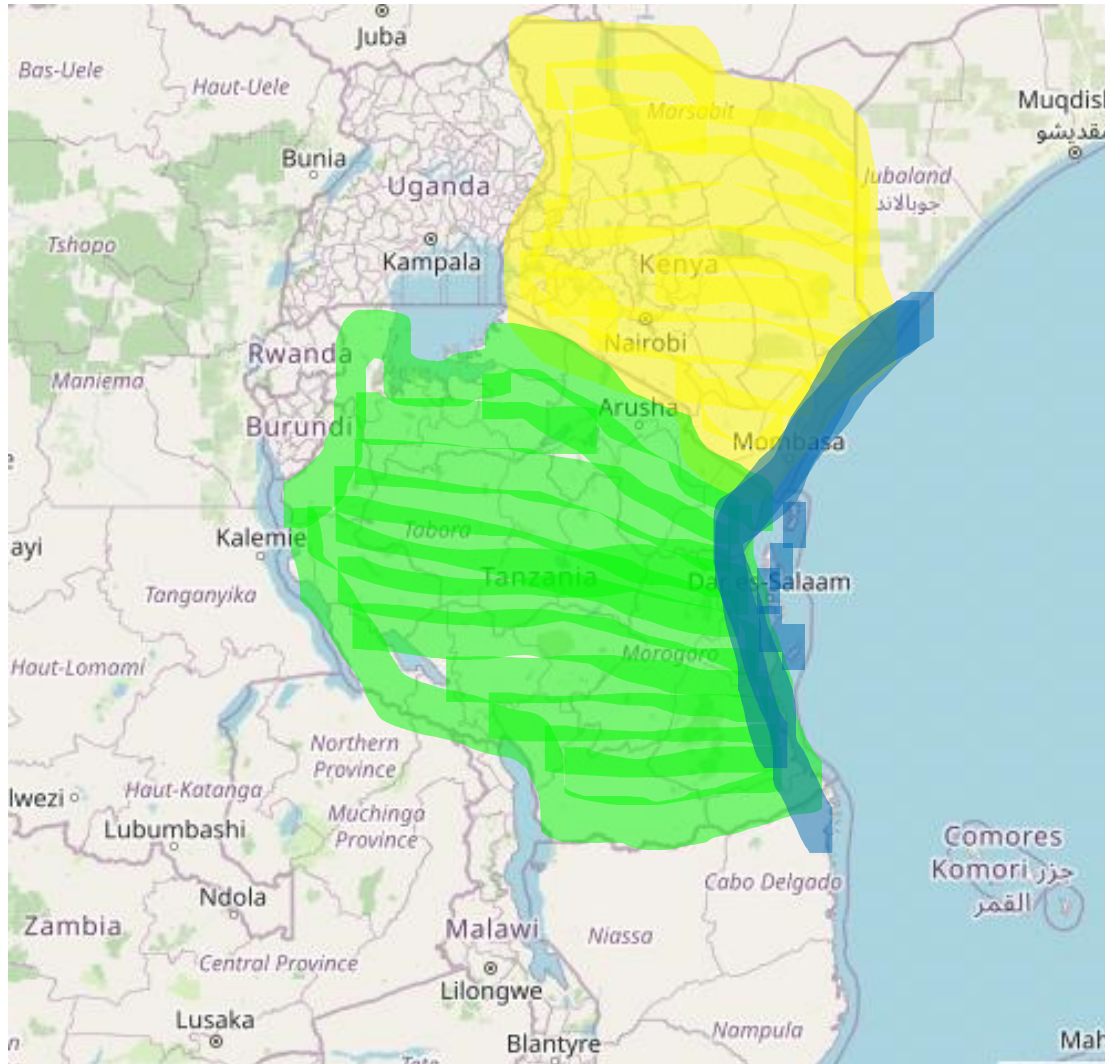
Four main Swahili dialect areas
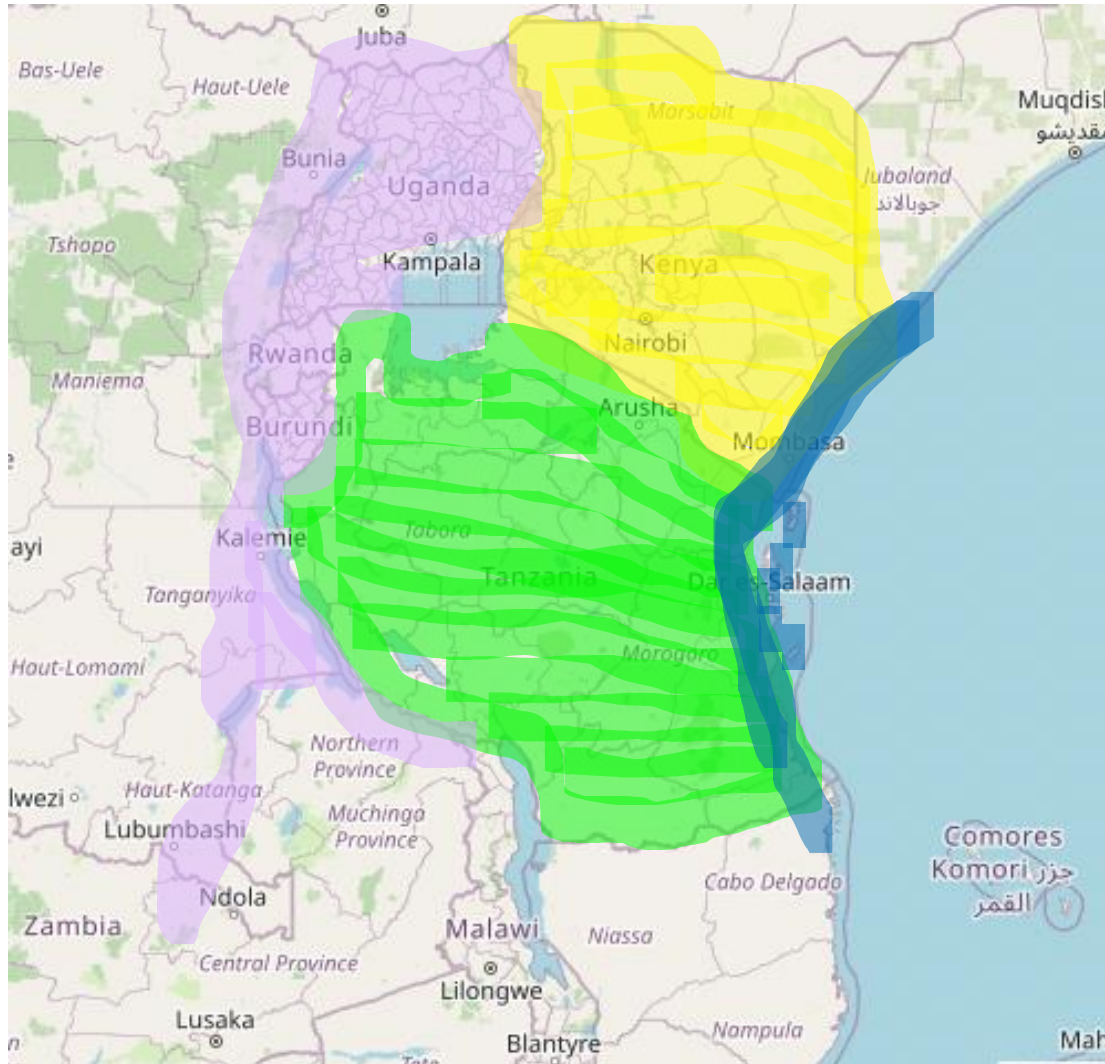
3. Language attitudes and sociolinguistic findings

Perception of variation and varieties

- Named, traditional 'dialects' found along the Swahili Coast
- Enduring perception that these are the varieties – *lahaja za Kiswahili*

➢ Do speakers consider there to be different
  ways of speaking Swahili?
➢ What are speakers' attitudes to variation?
➢ Who speaks similarly/differently? Why?

Perceptual survey

- Online perceptual survey in 2022
- 28 questions divided into four parts: demographics, language use, Swahili variation, Swahili varieties
- Choice of English or Swahili version
- Circulated via personal and professional networks
- 109 responses (not all questions answered)
- Good regional balance, but slight imbalances in gender and significant imbalances in age and, particular in level of education

Results from the perceptual survey

- Vast majority thinks there are different way of speaking Swahili
- Participants listed mostly established coastal dialects as named varieties, but also included other varieties such as urban youth language Sheng
- Respondents from the coast appear to have a stronger sense of own variety/dialect as distinct from surrounding ones
- Some expected patterns emerged with participants referring to coast vs mainland and national differences (TZ vs KE) as significant factors
- Participants referred to domains of use (e.g. 'street Swahili', school, home) and social factors (e.g. vocation, age, religion) as important
- Influence of 'first language' also often mentioned (e.g. 'Bantu Swahili, Kiswahili Kihindi, Chaga Swahili)

Sociolinguistic interviews: Attitudes to Swahili

- Data show varying attitudes towards Swahili, as well as different perceptions about this variation
- Coastal versus Mainland variation often mentioned, reflecting historical picture, enduring perception of variation and 'dialects'
- Coastal Swahili seen as original, 'pure', standard, prestigious
- Swahili sometimes contrasted with English
- Urban varieties seen as influential
- Nairobi Swahili seen as 'mixed' with a sense of being different from the approved 'standard' (and maybe all the educational, cultural and political power it represents) and of 'creating' a new standard

Attitudes towards on variation: Nairobi

"especially ukitoka apa uende Coast itakuwa completely different but since tuko hapa I think people have just come to understand, they've created something […] universal in Nairobi. Ili kila mtu anaelewa. […] tumecreate our own"

'Especially when you leave Nairobi and travel to the coast, it will be completely different but since we are here, I think people have just come to understand they've created something […] universal in Nairobi so that everyone understands. […] we have created our own'

(Nairobi 2023 Jelpke data, KIKWA01 - Young woman from Kikuyu suburb, university education, Nuer-speaker)

➢Nairobi Swahili as a distinct, alternative variety

4. Morphosyntactic variation

Morphosyntactic variation

- Methodology:
  - ➤ Swahili Dialects Syntax questionnaire
  - ➤ 76 morphosyntactic features
  - ➤ Based on attested Swahili and cross-Bantu variation
  - ➤ Data collected across the 7 project locations
  - ➤ Elicitations, fieldnotes and recordings of 'natural' data

- Focus on:
  - ➤ Locatives
  - ➤ Habitual marking
  - ➤ Noun classes and agreement

4.1 Locatives

Variation in locative marking

- In Swahili, nouns referring to locations can appear in at least the following three ways:

i. Unmarked: *shamba* 'field'

ii. Marked by the locative suffix *-ni*: *shambani* 'in/at/to etc. the field'

iii. Marked by a preposition such as *kwa, kwenye*: *kwa Juma* 'at/to/from etc. Juma (Juma's place)'

Use of *kwa* in locative constructions

- In coastal Swahili varieties, the preposition *kwa* can only be used with nouns referring to humans (cf. Ashton 1947)

(1) Ni-li-enda   **kwa**   rafiki   y-angu / daktari / m-sichana yule /   Rahma.

     SM1S-PST-go   PREP   9.friend 9-POSS   9.doctor   1-girl   1DEM   1.Rahma

     'I went to my friend/the doctor/that girl/Rahma ('s place).'

Use of *kwa* in locative constructions

- However, other varieties of Swahili allow *kwa* to introduce a non-human argument

(2) Wangapi   wa-li-enda   **kwa**   zile   shule

2-how.many   SM2-PST-go   PREP   10.DEM.DIST   10.school

zi-li-kua   zi-na-accept   gunia   y-a   mahindi

SM10-PST-be   SM10-PRES-accept   9sack   9-of   6.maize

as   school fees?

as   school fees?

'How many went to those schools which accepted sacks of maize as

school fees?'

Online study of locative marking

- Online questionnaire to examine locative marking in Swahili
- 59 respondents in Kenya and 36 responses from Tanzania.
- Participants were asked to judge 56 sample sentences as:

  ➤ (+) Very good example – this is something which sounds good and I can imagine myself saying it
  ➤ (0) Mixed – this is not perfect, but it's not completely bad either; I can imagine that I or someone else could say this if the situation is right.
  ➤ (-) Not a good example – this sounds wrong, and I don't think anyone would speak like this

Results from online survey – *kwa*

- Kenyan respondents preferred 'kwa shamba'

(3) Peleka   majembe   **kwa**   shamba

     take   6-hoes   PREP   5.farm

     'Take hoes to the farm.'

9. Peleka majembe kwa shamba.
36 responses
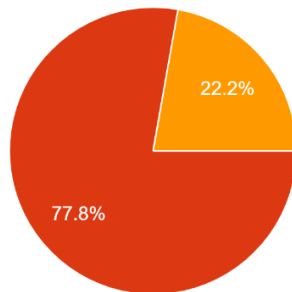
9. Peleka majembe kwa shamba.
60 responses

- (+) Very good example
- (-) Not a good example
- (0) Mixed

22.2%

77.8%

21.7%

23.3%

55%
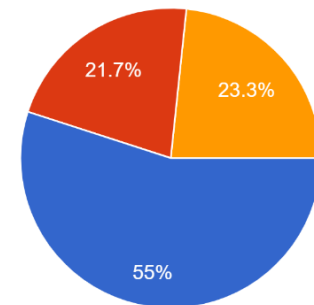
Tanzania

Kenya

Variation between Tanzania and Kenya

- In Kenya, *kwa* is accepted (preferred?) across all contexts.
- In Tanzania, the form with *kwa* is unacceptable for the majority of our respondents (79.4%).

54. Tulipeleka wageni kwa shule ya msingi na watoto waliwaimbia.
34 responses

- (+) Very good example
- (-) Not a good example
- (0) Mixed

79.4%

11.8%

8.8%
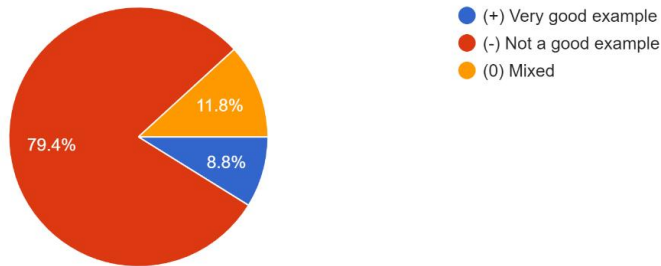
Tanzania

54. Tulipeleka wageni kwa shule ya msingi na watoto waliwaimbia.
58 responses

- (+) V
- (-) N
- (0) M

19%

17.2%

63.8%
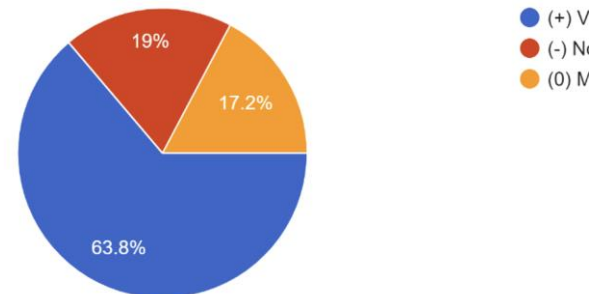
Kenya

Variation between Tanzania and Kenya

- Our project data supports the split between Kenya and Tanzania, also in coastal locations.

(4)   Ni-ko   kwa   gari

       1SG-LOC   in   car

       'I am in the car'   (Kilifi 2023, KFWB01)

- Both Mtwara and Dar es Salaam the use of *kwa* with inanimate locatives is ruled out.

(5)   *A-me-enda kwa   shule

       SM1-PRF-go   to   school

       'She has gone to school'

              (Mtwara; Dar es Salaam, Fieldnotes December 2022)

3.2 Habitual marking

Habitual marking in varieties of Swahili

- The habitual/iterative suffix *-ag* is widespread across Bantu and has been reconstructed for Proto-Bantu (Meeuseen 1967: 110)

- In Standard Swahili *-ag* has been 'lost' and instead, the habitual is formed using *hu-*

(6)   Wewe   **hu**-la   wapi?

            you   HAB-eat   where

            'Where do you (usually) eat?'

Habitual marking in varieties of Swahili

- However, we see the introduction of habitual *-ag-* in 'Colloquial Mainland Swahili'.

(7)   u-na-ku-l-**ag**-a   wapi ?
        SM2SG-PRES-STM-eat-HAB-FV   where
        'Where do you (usually) eat?' (Rugemalira 2010: 232)

"Standard Swahili may be reclaiming productive inflection *-ag-* and its wide occurrence in colloquial Swahili seems to be unstoppable."

(Rugemalira 2010: 232)

Habitual marking in varieties of Swahili

What has led to the rise of –*a(n)g*?

- Functional account: *hu-* does not show subject agreement, and is not in a canonical TAM position in the verb

- Contact motivation: *-a(n)g* is found in many Bantu languages of East Africa

- Sociolinguistic motivation: Marker of mainland, non-standard Swahili and maybe of sociolinguistic non-conformity and innovation?

Habitual marking in varieties of Swahili

- Colloquial Mainland Swahili has a high number of **second language speakers**, many of who have other Bantu languages (with *-ag/-ang*) as their first language

- Use of *-ag/-ang* in Swahili is associated with **mainland speakers** and **identities** to which this is linked

- The use of *-ag/-ang* in Colloquial Mainland Swahili can be seen as a '**reintroduction**' of morphology which had previously been lost

- Previous studies include Abe (2009) and Kanijo and Petzell (2023)

- However, so far no detailed study of variation in *-ag/-ang* marking has been conducted

Habitual marking in varieties of Swahili

- Comparison of the distribution of *-ag* and *-ang*
- Investigation of different functions of the suffixes

- Preliminary findings suggest a geographical split between Mainland Kenya and Tanzania and the Coast
- However, a number of local developments affect the exact function of the two forms, meaning that the situation is more complex
- Preliminary evidence for the existence of age gradation, particularly in the use of *-ang*

Distribution of *-ag, -ang* and *hu-*
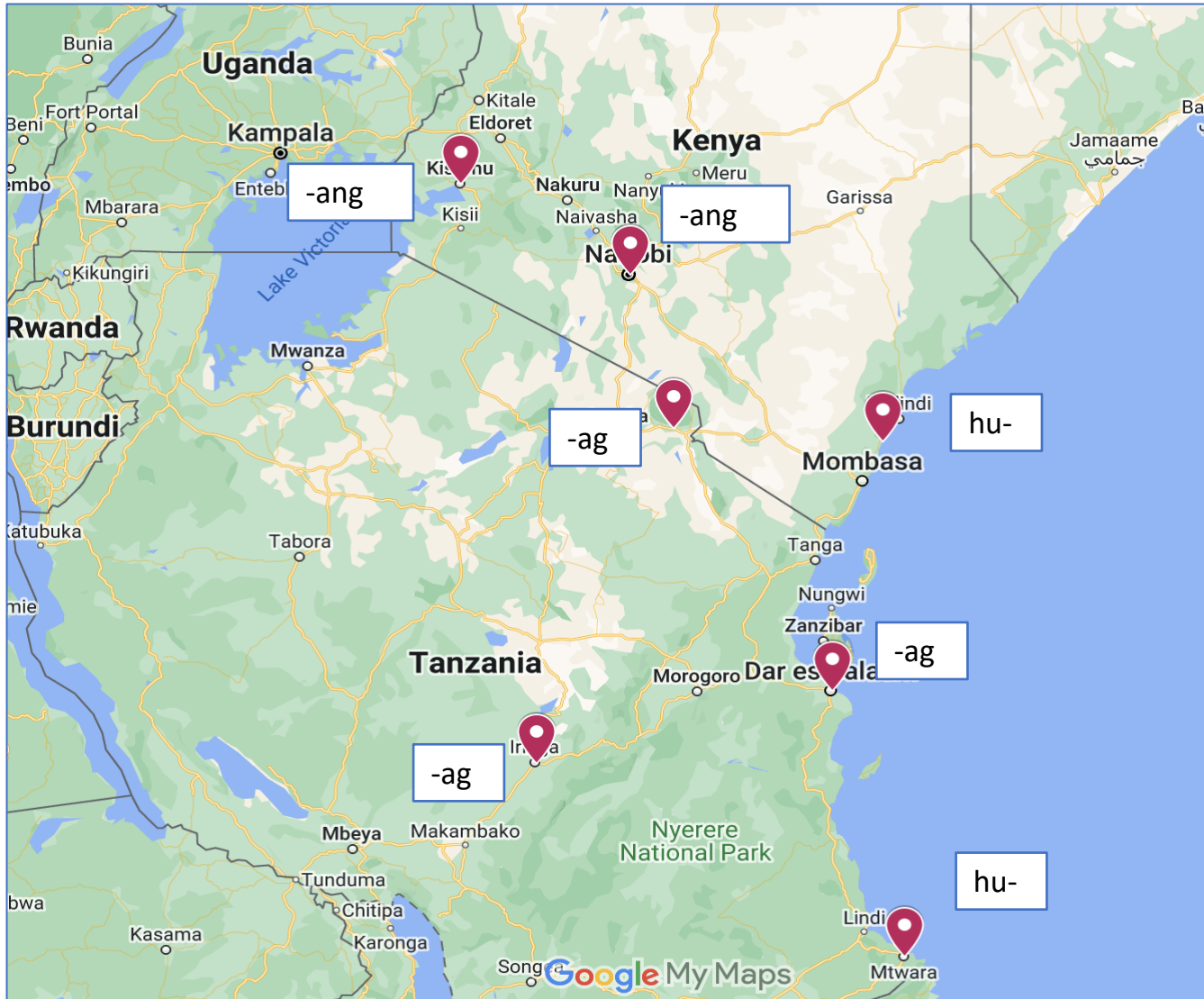
Habitual marking

(8)   Mbona   leo   u-na-chum-a   mapema,
          Q   today   SM2SG-PRS-harvest-FV   early
          wakati   u-na-chum-**ag**-a   jioni!
          time   SM2SG-PRS-harvest-HAB-FV   evening
          'How come you are harvesting early today? Normally you harvest in the evening'

                                      (Iringa, Fieldnotes June 2022)

(9)   Si-pik-**ang**-i
          NEGSM1sg-cook-HAB-NEG
          'I don't (usually) cook'

                                    (Kisumu 2022, KSMB08)

Habitual marking

(10)   Kanisa   **hu**wa   tu-na-onge-a
         9.church   HAB-be-FV   SM1PL-PRS-speak-FV

Ki-swahili   na   ki-ingereza.

7-Swahili   and   7-English

'At church we normally speak Swahili and English'

(Kilifi, KFMB0O3)

Habitual marking strategies across six locations

- Overall, we found seven main marking strategies for encoding habitual meaning in our data

	Dar es Salaam	Iringa	Mtwara	Nairobi	Kisumu	Kilifi
unmarked	o	o	✓	O	O	✓
hu-	✓	?	?	✓	✓	?
huwa	✓	✓	o	✓	✓	✓
-ag	✓	✓	*	✓	O	*
-ang	o	o	*	✓	✓	*
-ingi	o	o	o	✓	O	o
ki-	o	o	✓	o	O	o
sanasana	o	o	o	✓	O	✓
RED	o	✓	o	o	O	o

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Expansion of use of *-a(n)ga*

- *-ag* + subjunctive *-e*

(11)   Eeh   ni-onge-**ag**-e?
       eeh   SM1sg-speak-HAB-SBJV
       'Should I speak/ start speaking?'   (Iringa 2022, IRWB01)

- Unspecified past actions

(12)   Ni-li-end-**ag**-a   Zanzibar   mwaka   fulani
       SM1s-PAST-go-HAB-FV   Zanzibar   3.year   certain
        'I once visited Zanzibar'   (Iringa 2023, IRMA14)

- Future

(13)   Kesho   u-ta-ondok-**ag**-a?
       Tomorrow   SM2sg-FUT-leave-HAB-FV
       'Will you leave tomorrow?'   (Iringa, Fieldnotes June 2023)

Habitual marking in varieties of Swahili

- Geographical split between Mainland Kenya and Tanzania and the Coast
- Variation *-ang* (Kenya), *-ag* (Tanzania) and *hu-* and other strategies (Coast)
- Expansion in function and use, in some instances linked to diversification of forms allowing new and/or more fine-grained distinctions
- Potential age gradation

3.3 Noun classes and agreement

Noun classes and agreement

- Variation in noun class assignment and agreement is wide-spread across Bantu languages

- A corresponding variation is found in dialects of Swahili

- Variation often reflects wider patterns of morphological change

- Other developments are often local, reflecting specific contact situations

- Overall, variation in noun class morphosyntax does not so much reflect the broad dialect areas (between Mainland Kenya and Tanzania and the Coast), but shows diverse patterns of micro- and macro-variation

Noun classes and agreement

Noun class	Sanifu	Iringa	Mtwara	Moshi	DSM	Kisumu	Kilifi	NBO
1	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-
2	wa-	wa-	wa-	wa-	wa-	wa-	wa-	wa-
3	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-	m-
4	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-	mi-
5	(ji-)	(ji-)	(ji-)	(ji-)	(ji-)	(ji-)	(ji-)/ li-	(ji-)
6	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-	ma-
7	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-	ki-
8	vi-	vi-	vi-	vi-	vi-	vi-	vi-	vi-
9	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)
10	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)	(N-)
11	u-	u-	u-	u-	u-	u- / ru-	u-	u-
12	-	ka-	-	ka-	ka-	ka-	ka-?	ka-
13	-	tu-	-	tu-	tu-	tu-	tu-?	tu-
14	= 11	= 11	= 11	= 11	= 11	ru-?	= 11	= 11
15	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-
16	pa-	pa-	pa-	pa-	pa-	pa-	pa-	pa-
17	ku-	ku- (productive?)	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-	ku-
18	mu-	mu-	mu-	mu-	mu-	mu-	mu-	mu-
20	-	gu-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Augmentatives

- Class 5 with *li-* and *ji-* prefix use for augmentatives in Standard Swahili

(14)   Ji-tu

        5-person

        'a big person/giant'

        (Moshi, Fieldnotes February 2023)

- However, prefix *gu-* found in Iringa

(15)   gu-nyumba   gu-kubwa

        20-house   20-big

        'a big house'   (Iringa 2022, IRWA03)

Augmentatives

- This is likely due to language contact with Bena where class 20 prefix gu- indicates augmentation

(16)   **gu-**deembwe

20-elephant

'big elephant'

(Morrison 2011, p.147)

5. Summary and discussion

Summary

- High degree of morphosyntactic variation attested in Swahili
- Emerging findings suggest 4 dialect areas, supported by both sociolinguistic and structural data
- Sociolinguistic data show diverse attitudes varieties, and different perceptions about this variation
- Coastal versus Mainland often mentioned, reflecting historical picture and enduring perception of 'dialects'
- Other features are used across locations as well as more localized innovations probably related to language contact
- Multilingual language ecologies and language contact central to understanding variation in Swahili

Discussion and further questions

- What is our baseline and what are we comparing?

- Are we comparing speakers, communities or locations?

- What is the role of Standard Swahili in this picture?

- Do the languages and dialect we are using to conduct the research have an impact our findings?

- To what extent are our findings linked to our methodology and the methods we are using?

Asanteni! Thank you!

Thanks to the speakers, colleagues and community members we have worked with for their time, expertise and insights.