

Semantics of Kiswahili Adjectives

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Abstract

This paper presents a panoramic survey of Kiswahili adjectives by examining the following aspects of meaning: semantic classes, gradability, antonymy, and intensification. The data for this study were collected from newspapers, books, questionnaire and interview with ten University students from Dar es Salaam University College of Education. The study is guided by Dixons (1977, 1982, 2004) semantic classes. The paper makes a priori assumption that Kiswahili adjectives convey several meanings which cannot be stricto sensu classified into discrete semantic classes as proposed by Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004). It is noted that one Kiswahili adjective can express an infinite number of meanings, some of which may not be directly related to the original meaning which, consequently, makes the whole exercise of classification of adjectives into semantic types laborious and backbreaking. Looking at the behaviour of the adjective category, one cannot but say, there are more adjective meaning types in Kiswahili than those proposed by previous Kiswahili scholars, and that the meanings which are taken as basic in dictionaries ignore many other extra meanings expressed by Kiswahili adjectives.

Ikisiri

Makala hii inatalii kwa ufupi vivumishi vya Kiswahili kwa kuangalia vipengele vya kimaana vifuatavyo: uainishaji wa kisemantiki, ukadirifu, antonimia na mkazo. Data za utafiti huu zilikusanywa kupitia magazeti, vitabu, hojaji na mahojiano na wanafunzi kumi kutoka Chuo Kishiriki cha Elimu cha Chuo Kikuu cha Dar es Salaam. Utafiti huu uliongozwa na nadharia ya Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004) ya Kategoria za Kisemantiki za Vivumishi. Makala hii inasimamia dhana ya kuwa vivumishi vya Kiswahili huchanua maana mbalimbali ambazo haziwezi kuainishwa kwa ukamilifu katika makundi ya kisemantiki kama inavyodaiwa na Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004). Inaonekana kwamba kivumishi kimoja cha Kiswahili kinaweza kuchanua maana nyingi zisizo na kikomo, ambazo zingine kati ya hizo haziwezi kuhusishwa moja kwa moja na maana ya msingi; ambapo hatimaye hufanya zoezi zima la kuainisha vivumishi kwenye makundi ya kisemantiki

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kuwa la kuchosha na kuumiza akili. Mtu akichunguza tabia za kategoria ya kivumishi anaweza kusema kuwa kuna makundi zaidi ya maana za vivumishi katika Kiswahili zaidi ya zile zilizopendekezwa na wanazuoni wa Kiswahili waliotangulia, na kwamba maana zinazochukuliwa kuwa za msingi katika kamusi hupuuza maana nyingi za ziada zinazoelezwa na vivumishi vya Kiswahili.

1.0 Introduction

Categorization of words in the world languages has attracted a number of studies (Dixon, 1977, 1982, 2004; Baker, 2003; Rugemalira, 2008) among others. One issue of concern with regard to categorization is related to universality of the so called lexical categories. While most linguists subscribe to the view that verbs and nouns are universal lexical categories (Baker, 2003; Rugemalira, 2008), it is not generally accepted whether or not an adjective category is found in all languages of the world. Some languages are reported to have 15 adjectives; others, 3 adjectives, and other languages, for example, Korean (Kim, 2002) is reported to have no adjective category at all. According to Kim, in Korean language, what may be regarded as adjectives are stative verbs. It is claimed that there are different ways through which property concepts (which are expressed by adjectives in English) can be expressed in other world languages. Some scholars (Baker, 2003; Rugemalira, 2008) argue that the presence of an adjective is not mandatory in all languages. In a similar tone, some studies (Dixon, 1977, 1982; Baker, 2003; Rugemalira, 2008) show that in Bantu languages, an adjective class forms a closed class. In a somewhat simplified way, it is claimed that there are few adjectives in Bantu languages. It has been noted that property concepts which are expressed by adjectives in Indo-European languages may be expressed by nouns and/or verbs in Bantu languages (Dixon, 1977, 1982, 2004). For example, the word 'sick' is expressed as an adjective in English, as a noun (e.g. *mgonjwa* 'sick person') in Kiswahili, and as a verb (e.g. *bhina* 'get sick') in Shinyiha [M23]. This motivates a study on the status and identity of an adjective category in individual languages.

One of central issues with regard to adjectives is classification of adjective meanings. There have been several attempts to classify adjectives into semantic classes. The pioneer of semantic classification of adjectives is Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004). Dixon's classification of adjectives in what he calls semantic types has attracted the following questions: can we divide meanings into discrete classes? How many classes of these meaning types are there? In an attempt to classify adjective meanings, Dixon proposes the following semantic types associated with the adjective class: *dimension*: big, large, little, small, long, short, wide, etc.; *physical property*: hard, soft, heavy, light, rough, etc.; *colour*: black, white, etc.; *human propensity*: jealous, happy, kind, clever, generous, cruel, etc.; *age*: new, young, old, etc.; *value*: good, bad, perfect, pure, etc.; *speed*: fast, quick, slow, etc.; *difficulty*: easy, difficult,

slow, etc.; *similarity*: like, unlike, similar, differentiate, *qualification*: possible, common, etc.; *quantification*: all, many, some, few, only, etc.; *position*: high, low, near, far enough, etc.; and *cardinal numbers*. Dixon classifies languages according to the behaviour of the adjective class; those which have a clear large category of adjectives as well as those which have a small such class. Dixon claims that languages with small adjective classes always include terms that fall in the following semantic classes: *dimension*, *age*, *value*, and *colour*. Dixon (*ibid*) shows that a number of peripheral semantic types are typically associated with medium sized, and large adjective classes. He shows that other semantic classes surface as adjectives in languages with slightly larger adjective classes particularly; *human propensity* (happy, clever, kind), *physical property* (hard, heavy, hot), and *speed* (quick, slow, fast). This paper rounds off where Dixon left. I attempt to classify Kiswahili adjectives into semantic classes following Dixon's approach, but I slightly modify his classification by adding some semantic classes which were not included in Dixon's classes. This paper seeks to show that Kiswahili adjectives may express a variety of meanings which are contextually determined. Therefore, the basic meanings attached to certain adjectives may be misleading as these meanings ignore many other meanings which are pragmatically adjusted.

The study was conducted in the Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), and involved 200 second year students who were taking Linguistics and Kiswahili courses. Data for this study were collected through elicitation, and from the following newspapers: *HabariLeo* 5/4/2014, *HabariLeo* 17/6/2020, *Mwananchi* 13/5/2016 and *Mwananchi* 22/9/2020. These newspapers were randomly selected. From these newspapers, I obtained 70 noun phrases containing adjectives. Elicitation was done by means of a questionnaire and interview with students. About 10 students participated in the interview sessions and about 190 students filled up the questionnaires. I prepared a list of 100 English noun phrases containing different kinds of adjectives. The study participants were required to find their equivalence in Kiswahili. From questionnaires, I obtained more than 100 tokens, including both derived and underived adjectives in Kiswahili. This paper is divided into the following sections: introduction, classification of meanings expressed by Kiswahili adjectives, challenges of classification of adjectives into semantic types, semantic opposition for adjectives and conclusion.

2.0 Classification of Meanings Expressed by Kiswahili Adjectives

In this paper, I classify Kiswahili adjectives following the approach by Dixon's (1977, 1982, 2004) semantic classes. I shed light on the semantics of Kiswahili adjectives in order to unveil the peculiarity of this category in Kiswahili. Some studies (Gauton, 1994; Mpofo, 2009; Ngonyani, 2009; Nyanda, 2010) have attempted to examine the adjective category in individual Bantu languages. Kahigi

(2008) revisited the classification of Kiswahili adjectives, and came into conclusion that there are more adjectives in Kiswahili than what were identified by earlier scholars. However, he focused on the form; he did not pay attention to semantics of these adjectives. This study goes a step forward to examine semantic properties of adjectives. In this section, I classify Kiswahili adjectives based on what I consider as basic meaning. It is commonly agreed that adjectives express property concepts (Ngonyani, 2009; Osam, 1999; Palancar, 2006). Following the approach used by Dixon but slightly modified, here is an attempt to classify Kiswahili adjectives into meaning types. The different meanings are summarised in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below:

Table 1: Kiswahili Adjective Semantic Classes

Dimension		Value		Age		Colour		Behaviour	
-kubwa	'big'	-zuri	'good'	-pya	'new'	-eusi	'black'	-kali	'fierce'
-dogo	'small'	-baya	'bad'	-zima	'elderly'	-eupe	'white'	-zururaji	'loiterer'
-embamba	'thin'	-chakavu	'old'	-zee	'old'	-ekundu	'red'	-vivu	'lazy'
-efu	'long'	-kuukuu	'old'					-choyo	'greed'
-nene	'fat'							-pole	'polite'
-pana	'broad'							-ovu	'sinful'
								-ema	'kind'
								-karimu	'generous'
								-nyimi	'selfish'
								-toro	'truant'

Source: Newspapers, books and informants

The semantic classes in Table (1) above can be represented by a good number of adjectives in Kiswahili. Other semantic classes are found in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Kiswahili Adjective Semantic Classes (cont...)

Shape		Quantification		Difficulty		Physical appearance		Taste	
-viringo	'round'	-engi	'many', 'much'	-gumu	'hard'	chafu	'dirty'	-kali	'chocking'
-bapa	'flat'	-dogo	'little'			safi	'clean'	-chungu	'bitter'
		-chache	'few'					-chachu	'sour'

Source: Newspapers, books and informants

However, there are semantic classes with few members as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Kiswahili Adjective Semantic Classes (cont...)

Body condition		Weight		Miscellaneous	
-gonjwa	'sick'	-epesi	'light'	-geni	'foreign'
-zima	'alive', 'whole'	-zito	'heavy'	-enyeji	'native'

Source: Newspapers and informants

Tables 1, 2 and 3 above contain a list of some adjectives, and what my informants considered as their basic meanings in Kiswahili. As shown in Tables 1, 2, 3, there are many more meaning types than they were identified by Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004).

Some meanings cannot be classified into these semantic classes. What follows is a discussion of adjective semantic classes in Kiswahili with an attempt to show that even what we call here semantic classes have no clear cut boundaries.

2.1 Colour

The issue of colour was brought into attention by Berlin and Kay (1969), whose typological work was based on lexical semantics. According to Taylor (1991), colour is a radial category which has a prototypical semantic structure with a certain hue, for example, red being focal (prototypical), and other shades of red being less prototypical like orange, purple, mauve, etc. According to Berlin and Kay, there are basic colours, and non-basic colours. In Kiswahili, for example, the following are basic colours expressed as adjectives in Kiswahili: *-eusi* ‘black’, *-eupe* ‘white’, *-ekundu* ‘red’. Other basic colour terms are nouns. These are: *-kijani* ‘green’, *-njano* ‘yellow’, *bluu* ‘blue’. These colour terms are noun-like as they cannot modify nouns. *Bluu* is borrowed from the English colour term ‘blue’. The determination of basic colours was based on the following criteria: *structure* (simple morphology), *semantics* (do not subsume other colour), and *frequency of use*. In Kiswahili, basic colour terms that appear as adjectives have simple morphology and share the following properties: (1) they agree with the head noun, (2) they copy the class prefix of the relevant noun, and (3) they express property concepts. Some colour terms are associated with some connotations: For example, *-eupe* ‘white’ is associated with goodness, holiness, cleanliness, sanctity, purity, kindness, emptiness etc. The colour term *-eusi* ‘black’ is associated with dirt, darkness, unholiness, impurity, unkindness, etc. Connotations associated with certain colours seem to be universal. Colour terms may occur with nouns to create metaphorical meanings as in the following example from a newspaper.

Kwa dhamira safi na moyo mweupe lit. with clear consciousness and white heart
(*Mwananchi Newspaper*, March 8th 2017)

The co-occurrence of these nouns with *colour* terms is not haphazard. For example, one might talk of a *white heart* but not a *white kidney*. A kidney, for instance, is not associated with such connotations. The colour term *nyekundu* ‘red’ is associated with shedding of blood, danger, etc. When asked to give examples of sentences containing the colour term *-ekundu* ‘red’, the participants gave the following example: *mwanamke alikasirika na akawa mwekundu* ‘The woman was angry and became reddish’, *Amenipa noti nyekundu* ‘He gave me a red note’. The colour term *kijani* ‘green’ which is basically a noun is associated with ‘good harvest’. This association may be due to the colour of leaves to signify good harvest. Other colour terms carry no connotations with them. Colour terms have prototypical and periphery meanings. For example, the prototypical meaning of *-eupe* is ‘white’. All other extended meanings of *-eupe* are

peripheral and derive their basic meaning from the concept of ‘whiteness’. Context will inform the reader/listener what the colour term actually refers to.

2.2 Dimension/Size

The most versatile adjectives in this category are *-kubwa* ‘big’ and *-dogo* ‘small’. Others are: *-efu* ‘tall’, ‘long’, *-embamba* ‘thin’, etc. These adjectives are often regarded as dimensional for their interpretation is tightly dependant on entity values along a scalar dimension. The other adjectives are regarded as multidimensional (Klein, 1980). The domain of size to which adjectives, for example, *-kubwa* applies is very relative. For example, *jiwe kubwa* ‘big stone’ is not the same as *mtu mkubwa* ‘big person’, and not the same as *Mungu ametenda mambo makubwa* ‘God has done great things’, etc. *Jiwe kubwa* ‘big stone’ refers to the size of the stone but *mtu mkubwa* ‘a big person’ may mean someone who is big in size or who has a high position in the government, etc. When some one says *Mungu amefanya mambo makubwa* he/she may not refer to the size of things but to wonderful things God has done, for example, wonders and miracles (this shows vagueness of meanings of the adjectives). Adjectives of dimension are those indicated in the following table:

Table 4: Adjectives of Dimension

Length/height		Width		Breadth		Length and Breadth	
<i>-efu</i>	‘tall’, ‘long’	<i>-pana</i>	‘wide’	<i>-pana</i>	‘broad’	<i>-kubwa</i>	‘big’
<i>-fupi</i>	‘short’			<i>-nene</i>	‘fat’	<i>-dogo</i>	‘small’
				<i>-embamba</i>	‘thin’		

Source: Newspapers, books and informants

Adjectives of size can be used with different nouns to express a variety of meanings. For example, the adjective *-kubwa* ‘big’ can be used to modify many other nouns that cannot be measured in terms of height, breadth or length. These include concrete and abstract nouns. For example:

Table 5: Semantics of adjectives of size

God		People		Natural phenomena	
<i>Mungu mkubwa</i>	‘A powerful God, mighty God’	<i>mtu mkubwa</i>	‘A great man’	<i>mvua kubwa</i>	‘heavy rain’
<i>Yesu ni mkubwa sana</i>	‘Jesus is very great’	<i>mkutano mkubwa</i>	‘a huge crowd’		

Source: Informants

The adjective *-kubwa* can be applied to an infinite number of entities, since there is no upper limit of size. The adjective *-efu* ‘tall’ is used with reference to both the vertical and horizontal extent of the objects as shown in the table below:

Table 6: Adjectives of size

Vertical reference		Horizontal reference	
<i>mtu mrefu</i>	‘a tall person’	<i>njia ndefu</i>	‘long road’
<i>mti mrefu</i>	‘a tall tree’	<i>kamba ndefu</i>	‘long rope’

Source: Newspapers and Informants

In Table (7) above, the adjective *-efu* ‘tall/long’ co-occurs with different nouns. An example of co-occurrence of *-efu* with the noun ‘road’ is found in the following example; *Akahakikisha kuondoa tatizo la gharama kwa kuanzisha njia ndefu* ‘He ensured to cut costs by introducing long roads’. The adjective *-efu* ‘tall’ can also be used with many other nouns that cannot be physically measured, for example, words like *mwaka* ‘year’, *mwezi* ‘month’, etc. The following examples are illustrative:

- (1) a. *mwaka mrefu* ‘a long year’
 b. *mwezi mrefu* ‘a long month’

The above examples show how the same adjective may refer to different dimensions ranging from concrete objects to abstract entities which cannot be physically measured. This is vagueness of the meaning of adjectives in Bantu. They also show how human beings can relate objects based on certain similarities.

2.3 Value

These are adjectives that describe the way something looks or appears. Simply put, value refers to how good or bad something is. Dixon (1982) generalises that an adjective class always contains adjectives *good* and *bad*. Adjectives of value can be used to denote many meanings. Some examples are:

- (2) a. *-zuri* ‘good’,
 b. *-baya* ‘bad’

The adjectives *-zuri* ‘good’ and *-baya* ‘bad’, can express a variety of meanings. For example, the adjective *-zuri* conveys meanings such as attractive, goodlooking, beautiful, handsome, kind, generous, etc. The adjective *-baya* ‘bad’ expresses a variety of meanings such as bad, ugly, unkind, sinful, etc. The adjectives *-baya* ‘bad’ and *-zuri* ‘good’, can collocate with different nouns to refer to other shades of meaning. For example, according to the study participants, *mwalimu mzuri* could convey the following meanings ‘a good teacher’, ‘a handsome teacher’, ‘a kind teacher’, ‘a competent teacher’, etc. The adjective *-zuri* may be used with both objects and abstract things to denote several meanings.

2.4 Age

There are few simple adjectives referring to age. These are *-dogo* ‘young, small’, *-kubwa* ‘elder’, *-pya* ‘new’, *-zee* ‘old’. Examples are: *mtoto mdogo* ‘a little child’, *mtu*

mkubwa ‘an elder person’, etc. Some adjectives of age can be used with kinship terms to refer to ‘one’s uncle or aunt’. For example:

Table 7: Adjectives of Age

Kinship Term	Adjective	Example
<i>Baba</i> ‘father’	<i>-kubwa</i> ‘big’	<i>Baba mkubwa</i> lit. ‘elder father’
<i>Mama</i> ‘mother’	<i>-kubwa</i> ‘big’	<i>Mama mkubwa</i> lit. ‘elder mother’, ‘aunt’
<i>Baba</i> ‘father’	<i>-dogo</i> ‘small’	<i>Baba mdogo</i> ‘lit. young father’, ‘uncle’

Adjectives of age describe human beings as well as animals as in *nyoka mkubwa* ‘a big snake’, *mbuzi mkubwa* ‘a big goat’, etc. As it will be shown later, these adjectives of age appear in other meaning types, for example adjectives of size.

2.5 Physical Appearance

Adjectives in this group describe the physical appearance. A few adjectives in Kiswahili express physical appearance, for example:

- (3) a. *-gumu* ‘hard’
 b. *-chafu* ‘dirty’
 c. *-safi* ‘clean’

The above examples describe the appearance of objects physically. For example:

- (4) a. *meza ngumu* ‘a hard table’
 b. *ubao mgumu* ‘a hard board’
 c. *nguo chafu* ‘a dirty cloth’

The same adjectives can be used with abstract entities to convey idiomatic or metaphorical expressions. The following examples from study participants are illustrative:

- (5) a. *mawazo machafu* lit. ‘dirty thoughts’ ‘evil thoughts’
 b. *moyo mgumu* lit. ‘hard heart’ ‘courageous’
 c. *mdomo mchafu* lit. ‘dirty mouth’ ‘a mouth that insults’
 d. *dhamira safi* lit. ‘clean mind’ ‘good consciousness’

Source: Informants

It is worth noting that most meanings that are conveyed by English adjectives can also be obtained metaphorically as in (5) above.

2.6 Behaviour

Adjectives denoting behaviour are those that occur with human beings or animals. Dixon (1982, 2004) terms this property as human propensity. I found the use of human propensity inappropriate here as it ignores some of the behaviour in animals. Adjectives in this class describe an attitude on the part of one participant towards someone or

something else. Examples of these adjectives are: *-kali* ‘fierce’, *-zururaji* ‘loiterer’, *-vivu* ‘lazy’, *-choyo* ‘selfish’ and *-pole* ‘polite’. Adjectives of behaviour can occur with both animals and human beings. Examples are *simba mkali* ‘a fierce lion’, *nyoka mkali* ‘a venomous snake’, etc. Some of these adjectives can be used with some nouns to create metaphorical meanings. For example, the word *-kali* can create several meanings. Some of these meanings extend towards the negative pole (Goodness, 2018). Adjectives of behaviour can be categorized into the following groups: those showing positive social behaviour, and those showing negative social behaviour. Adjectives showing positive social behaviour are *-aminifu* ‘faithful’, *chapakazi* ‘hardworking’, *-pole* ‘polite’, *jasiri* ‘bold’, *shupavu* ‘brave’, *-kweli* ‘truth teller’, *-bunifu* ‘creative’, etc. Adjectives showing negative social behaviour include: *-vivu* ‘lazy’, *-zembe* ‘careless’, *-danganyifu* ‘deceitful’, *-korofi* ‘cruel’, etc. Most of these adjectives are derived from verbs. Adjectives of behaviour that can be used with both human beings and animals are: *-kali* ‘harsh’, ‘cruel’, *-pole* ‘polite’, *-janja* ‘cunning’, etc. Most adjectives of behaviour are used with human beings.

2.7 Quantification

Quantity refers to amount that can be altered by decrease or incrementation. Quantity is expressed through the following quantifiers: *-zima* ‘whole’, *-ingi* ‘many’, ‘much’, *chache* ‘few’ and *-dogo* ‘little’. Adjectives of quantity can be used with different kinds of nouns to create various meanings. For example, the root *-dogo* can be used with different kinds of nouns to show quantity. Examine the following examples:

- (6) a. *-dogo* ‘little, few’
 b. *-ingi* ‘many, much’

Observe its use when occurring with its respective nouns:

- (7) a. *maji kidogo* ‘a little water’
 b. *chakula kidogo* ‘a little food’
 c. *mahindi kidogo* lit. ‘a little maize’
 d. *maharage kidogo* lit. ‘a little beans’
 e. *mafuta kidogo* lit. ‘little oil’

Source: Informants

In view of examples (7) above, *-dogo* occurs with diverse nouns such as liquids like *maji*, ‘water’ and *mafuta* ‘oil’ Likewise, the quantitative *-ingi* can be used with both plural countable nouns, for example, *mawe* ‘stones’, *vitabu* ‘books’ etc. to indicate ‘many’, and uncountable nouns, for example, *maji* ‘water’, *sukari* ‘sugar’ to indicate the concept of ‘much’. The following examples are illustrative:

- (8) a. *mawe mengi* ‘many stones’ (countable)
 b. *watu wengi* ‘many people’ (countable)
 c. *maji mengi* ‘much water’ (uncountable)
 d. *mafuta mengi* ‘much oil’ (uncountable)

This implies that Kiswahili speakers view the concept of quantity in the same way, no matter whether it expresses countable or uncountable entities. Quantifiers, *-dogo*, and *-ingi* are gradable. As such, they can be used in all constructions where a gradable adjective occurs. For example:

- (9) a. *visu vyangu ni vingi kuliko vya Musa* ‘My knives are more (in number) than Musa’s
 b. *mawe yangu ni mengi kuliko ya Musa* ‘My stones are more (in number) than Musa’s
 c. *Maria amenunua nguo nyingi kuliko wewe* ‘Maria has bought more clothes than you’.

The quantifier *-zima* ‘whole’ denotes quantity. For example:

- (10) a. *ng’ombe mzima* ‘the whole cow’
 b. *mbuzi mzima* ‘the whole goat’
 c. *siku nzima* ‘the whole day’

From the meaning it denotes, the adjective *-zima* is not gradable, and it can, therefore, not be intensified. It is already noted that quantifiers look similar to other adjectives morphologically in that they occur with a variable prefix. Syntactically, they modify the noun, they can occur attributively like: *wale watoto ni wengi* ‘Those children are many’, and semantically, they express quantity. Following semantics criterion, quantifiers bear most characteristics of typical adjectives compared to other categories in the closed system. The following examples are illustrative:

- (11) a. Intensification
Walikuwapo watu wengi sana ‘There were too many people’
 b. Gradability
Walikuwapo watu wengi kuliko waliokuwapo Tabora ‘There were so many people compared to those who were in Tabora’.

The above examples show that quantifiers are almost similar to pure adjectives as they may be intensified.

3.0 Challenges of Classification of Adjectives into Semantic Classes

The preceding section has presented meanings expressed by different adjectives in Kiswahili. The classification of meanings expressed by adjectives in Kiswahili poses some challenges. For example, certain adjectives when occurring in certain contexts do not clearly show what semantic class they denote. For instance, while the adjective *-kubwa* ‘big’ denotes size, it is not clear how it should be classified while used with kinship terms. For example, in *baba mkubwa* lit. ‘an elder father’, ‘uncle’, and *baba mdogo* lit. ‘a young father’, ‘uncle’.

Another challenge encountered in the classification of adjectives into semantic types is related with overlapping of meanings. For instance, one adjective may convey

several meanings which belong to different semantic classes. Consider the meanings of the following adjectives in Dixon's (1982) semantic types:

Table 8: Adjectives with Double Meanings and Semantic Classification

Adjective	Meaning 1	Semantic type	Meaning 2	Semantic type
<i>-kali</i>	'bitter'	taste	'fierce'	behaviour
<i>-zima</i>	'whole'	quantity	'alive'	not clear

Source: Informants

The adjective *-chungu* when used with things such as food, medicine, etc., denotes 'bitterness' or 'sourness'. For instance:

- (12) a. *dawa chungu* 'a bitter medicine'
 b. *chakula kichungu* 'bitter food'

The adjective *-kali* can be used with things to denote the notion of paining, piercing, sharp, pinching, etc. For example, *kisu kikali* 'a sharp knife' as opposed to *kisu butu* 'a blunt knife'. Another example of overlapping occurs with the already mentioned adjective, *-dogo* which expresses more than one semantic class i.e. 'age', 'size' and 'quantity'. The following examples provide a simpler illustration:

Table 9: Overlapping of meanings of the adjective -dogo

<i>-dogo</i> (showing size)	<i>-dogo</i> (used with kinship terms)	<i>-dogo</i> (denoting amount)
<i>Kiti kidogo</i> 'a small chair'	<i>Baba mdogo</i> lit. 'a young father, 'uncle'	<i>Maji kidogo</i> 'little water'
<i>Kitabu kidogo</i> 'a small book'	<i>Mama mdogo</i> lit. 'a young mother', 'aunt'	<i>Pesa kidogo</i> 'a little money'
<i>Mkate mdogo</i> 'a small bread'	<i>Ng'ombe mdogo</i> lit. 'a young cow', 'heifer'	<i>Chakula kidogo</i> 'a little food'

Source: Informants

In short, in Swahili there are several sets of meanings for which it is difficult to decide whether they should be left as distinct notions or grouped together. Many classical approaches would consider such words like *-dogo* as a case of polysemy. This conclusion is likely to cause complications. We take the view that these are not different words but the same word whose several meanings are a result of semantic expansion, semantic change and semantic shift. In other words, the different meanings of adjectives are traceable to the basic meaning of that adjective. Similarly, one adjective expressing a single meaning seems to appear in more than one semantic class. For example, it is not clear whether to categorize *-ngumu* 'hard' under the semantic type of 'difficulty' or 'physical appearance' since it seems to fit in both types. It is also not clear whether to categorize *viringo* 'round' under the semantic type of physical appearance or dimension. It seems these problematic words fit in more than one

semantic class. The point I would like to cement here is that, while it is a bit easier to classify morphological aspects, it is somewhat difficult to classify meanings, since meanings are not tangible or concrete; any classification based on meaning is likely to be fallible. The semantics of Kiswahili adjectives clearly indicate that the boundary between meanings is fuzzy. Therefore, there is no such thing as core semantic types as proposed by Dixon (1977, 1982, 2004).

4.0 Semantic Oppositions for Adjectives

Dixon (2004) distinguishes between two kinds of semantic oppositions for adjectives; antonymy and complementarity. An antonym pair is relative to some implicit norm, that is, they do not provide absolute descriptions. Antonyms occur frequently in comparative constructions, and then establish a converse relation: If A is longer than B, then B is shorter than A. Kiswahili in its internal organisation displays binary oppositions (i.e. a set of adjectives divided into pairs of antonyms). Table 10 below is illustrative:

Table 10: Adjectives and their specific antonyms

Adjective	Gloss	Antonym	Gloss
<i>-kubwa</i>	'big', 'fat'	<i>-dogo</i>	'small'
<i>-nzuri</i>	'good', 'beautiful'	<i>-baya</i>	'bad', 'ugly'
<i>-eusi</i>	'black'	<i>-eupe</i>	'white'
<i>-embamba</i>	'thin'	<i>-nene</i>	'fat'
<i>-efu</i>	'tall', 'long'	<i>-fupi</i>	'short'

Source: Informants

The following semantic types allow antonymic pairs: dimension, value, age, and physical appearance. However, not all adjectives in each semantic class can form an antonymic pair. Let us take an example of dimension. The positive member of each pair of adjectives of dimension is the unmarked member, for example, *-kubwa* 'big', *-dogo* 'small', etc. Actually, in Kiswahili, sets made only of strict pairs of antonyms (i.e. the symmetric sets) are not so common. Also, there are adjectives which although they are expected to have antonyms, they do not.

Adjectives of age have no clear antonyms. For example, the adjective *-zee* 'old' cannot be considered to be the antonym of *-pya* 'new' since the use of *-zee* is restricted to human beings. Adjectives expressing behaviour do not have clear complements or antonyms but rather receive their semantic oppositions relative to a certain social norm. This should be a universal characteristic. As far as evaluative adjectives are concerned, adjectives in this class do not have very clear antonyms since these concepts are fuzzy, for example:

- (13) *-zuri* vs. *-baya* 'good' vs. 'bad'
 -safi vs. *-chafu* 'clean' vs. 'dirty'

-baya and *-zuri* have a variety of meanings associated with them. In certain cases, it is difficult to assign an antonymic pair. For example, there is no clear antonym for *-baya* when it refers to ‘sinful’. Speakers tend to use two words; *-baya* and *-zuri* for any meaning related to ‘bad’ and ‘good’ respectively. The findings of this study conflict with Dixon’s (1982) proposal on cross-linguistic types of adjectives with regard to whether they form antonymic pairs or not. In his proposal, he shows that in languages: dimension, age, and value have clear antonyms, which is not always the case in Kiswahili. Complements are distinguished from antonyms by the fact that with complements, the denial of one term implies the assertion of the other and vice versa. True antonyms cannot occur in comparative constructions, they give complete descriptions. There are marked gaps in the symmetry of the antonymic pairs. How the language fills in these gaps sheds some insights into Kiswahili adjectival strategies. In one case, certain adjectives have become neutralized such that one adjective, for example, *-dogo* ‘small’ is also used to signify ‘young’, ‘little’. Dixon notes that such semantic neutralization, particularly within semantic types falls into regular cross-linguistic patterns.

5.0 Gradability

Gradability is a typical characteristic of adjectives in the world languages. Kiswahili adjectives as well display the property of gradability. The adjective is not inflected to express comparison. Comparative and superlative degrees are expressed by periphrastic constructions.

Comparatives

- (14) a. *Juma ni mzuri kuliko Ali* ‘Juma is better than Ali’
 b. *Mariamamu ni mrefu kuliko Sara* ‘Mary is taller than Sara’
 c. *Mama yangu ni mnene kuliko baba yangu* ‘My mother is fatter than my father’

Source: Informants

In most cases, the semantic property of ‘colour’ displays the property of complementarity because it does not consist of two poles, but a set of related unordered items in the sense that if something is not *-eupe* it may be *-eusi* or *-red*, etc. However, some colours show the property of gradability. For example, it is possible to say, *nguo yangu ni nyeupe kuliko yako* ‘my cloth is whiter than yours’. ‘Whiteness’ is an example with no clear implications for the other elements in the scale.

The semantic property of ‘shape’ as well shows both properties of complementarity and gradability. With regard to complementarity, something is either *-viringo* ‘round’ or not, or something is *-viringo* ‘round’ or *-bapa* ‘flat’. The most frequent adjectives used with comparatives are adjectives of dimension/size followed by value, age and quantification. The other less frequent ones are those that denote behaviour, colour and physical appearance.

6.0 Intensification

All prototypical adjectives can be intensified. For example:

Table 11: Intensification of adjectives

Noun	Adjective	Intensifier	Example
<i>mtoto</i> ‘child’	<i>-zuri</i> ‘good’	<i>sana/mno</i> very	<i>Mtoto mzuri sana/mno</i> ‘a very good child’
<i>nyumba</i> ‘house’	<i>-baya</i> ‘bad’	<i>sana</i>	<i>Nyumba mbaya sana</i> ‘a very bad house’
<i>mtoto</i> ‘child’	<i>-efu</i> ‘tall’	<i>sana</i>	<i>Mtoto ni mrefu sana</i> ‘A child is very tall’

Source: Informants

Colour terms can be intensified by two strategies: by the use of an intensifier *sana* or *mno* as in examples (11), or by the use of ideophones. These ideophones are only used with adjectives with which they collocate.

Table 12: Intensification of colour terms

Adjective	Gloss	Ideophone	Adjective plus Ideophone	Gloss
<i>-eupe</i>	‘white’	<i>pe</i>	<i>-eupe pe</i>	‘very white’
<i>-eusi</i>	‘black’	<i>ti</i>	<i>-eusi ti</i>	‘very black’

Source: Informants

It is worth noting that not all colour terms occur with ideophones. For example, *-kijani* ‘green’, *-njano* ‘yellow’, *-kijivu* ‘grey’ do not occur with ideophones. There are two assumptions for why speakers tend to assign ideophones to ‘white’ and ‘black’ only. One, it is not always clear, what exactly constitutes white or black colour. For example, the following are referred to as *-eupe* ‘white’: cream, maize flour, and people specifically Europeans. In addition to that according to Kiswahili speakers, there are different degrees of whiteness or blackness but not of greenness. Adjectives that occur with intensifiers more frequently than others are those that show dimension followed by value, age, colour, human propensity, physical appearance and quantification.

7.0 Summary and Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to examine the semantic structure of the category adjective in Kiswahili. I have surveyed some semantic aspects like antonymys and semantic oppositions, gradability and I have attempted to classify Kiswahili adjectives into semantic classes. The classification reveals that meanings of adjectives cannot be confined to few inclusive classes as there are individual adjectives that cannot be classified with other adjectives. As such, other adjectives are isolated, having their own

classification. This makes the whole activity of classification interesting and warranting further investigations. With regard to semantic aspects like antonymy, complementarity and gradability, the findings indicate that Kiswahili adjectives are not exceptional with regard to other semantic characteristics. The paper reveals that previous approaches to the classification of adjectives into meaning types cannot work with Kiswahili adjectives. The paper further notes that Kiswahili adjectives are rich in meaning, and when pragmatics is taken into consideration, Kiswahili adjectives may express an infinite number of meanings.

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