

High-detail reference structures in an electronic dictionary of Swahili

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The talk reports on the current state of an ongoing project aiming to create an electronic Swahili-Polish dictionary and focuses on an innovative learner-oriented feature that can be introduced into both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries of Swahili.

The idea is to visualize derivational families of Swahili words, thus making it easier for users both to perceive the morphological regularities and to traverse the dictionary along the branches of derivational trees. The proposal relies on the high degree of regularity of Swahili derivational morphology and is set in the context of a small (over 1000 entries) Swahili-English dictionary. This minidictionary serves as a testing ground for the encoding format, an application of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) Guidelines (Sperberg-McQueen & Burnard 2007), that we will adopt for the final version of the electronic Swahili-Polish dictionary.

Traditional cross-entry references, especially among word-families, offer one-sided view of derivational relationships (derivative → root). The introduction of run-on entries offers a view from the opposite side (root → derivatives). Typically, however, word-families feature more than two generations of words, and quite often the link between the ends of the chain (root ↔ complex derivative) is either unclear to the average speaker or at least not as important as the relationship between the immediately related lexemes. We present a few Swahili-related arguments supporting this claim.

The arguments for implementing the visualisation of the derivational patterns of Swahili are of two kinds: systemic (establishing links between closely related lexemes, in order to aggregate the necessary information or to navigate the dictionary) and didactic (making the user aware of the regularities in the maze of Bantu morphology).

The presentation will be accompanied by a demonstration of a prototype version of the navigation/aggregation tool for the web version of the dictionary.

Bibliography

Sperberg-McQueen, C.M. and Lou Burnard (eds). 2007. TEI P5: Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange. Available at <http://www.teic.org/P5/>