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Useful Swahili Words

Pronunciation

To be able to pronounce Swahili words correctly, I strongly recommend the [Teach Yourself Swahili CD](#). You can also check out the [Introduction to Kiswahili Language](#) by *AbdulGhany Mohammed and Kassim A. Abdullah* or the [Swahili Pronunciation Guide](#) by *Thomas Hinnebusch and Sarah Mirza*. Some pronunciation is provided in each section of this page in MP3 format. Just click on the Swahili words. You may have to replay the words in some cases.

Quick Swahili Lessons

Many readers of this page have been asking me where they can have quick Swahili lessons. The [Teach Yourself Swahili CD](#) has been prepared exactly to address that need. For those who get a chance to visit Zanzibar, Tanzania, they can have Swahili lessons from the [Institute of Kiswahili and Foreign Languages, Zanzibar](#). Follow the link for more information. Various universities in North America, Europe, and Asia, also offer such lessons. You may locate through the Internet the one that is closest to you.

Swahili Basics

Swahili is one of the easiest languages to learn. Here are a few basic things to know about Swahili:

Swahili verbs always carry with them the subject (and sometimes the object) and the tense. For example, *Ninakula*, is a complete sentence which means "I am eating". *Ni-* prefix stands for the subject "I", the *-na-* affix stands for "am" showing the tense i.e. the "present continuous" tense, and *-kula* is the root of the verb "eat".

Another example, *Alitupa zawadi* which means "He/She gave us gifts". First of all note that in the Swahili language, the pronouns are the same for all the genders - he, him, she, and her are not distinguishable in Swahili - same words, prefixes, affixes and suffixes are used. The well sought after "gender equality" is in-built in the Swahili language!! Now back to the sentence. The prefix *A-* stands for the subject "He" or "She", the *-li-* affix indicates the past tense, the *-tu-* affix stands for the object "us", and *-pa* is the root of the verb "give".

More examples:

Nilikula - I ate
Nimekula - I have eaten
Ninakula - I am eating
Nitakula - I will eat

If you have any comments or questions, I'd be pleased to receive them at:
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Greetings

Between peers: "Habari!" and the greeted answers, "Nzuri!".
Between peers: "Hujambo?" (Are you fine?) and the greeted answers, "Sijambo!" (I'm fine!)
Young to older: "Shikamoo!" (originally it meant "I touch your feet" as a sign of respect) and the greeted answers, "Marahabaa!" (I acknowledge your respect!).

Personal Pronouns

English	Swahili
I	Mimi
We	Sisi
You (singular)	Wewe
You (plural)	nyinyi
He	Yeye
She	Yeye
They	Wao

Common Dialogue

Sentence/Phrase	Response
Habari! (Hello!/Hi!)	Nzuri! (Good!/Fine!)
Ninaitwa Charles. Wewe unaitwaje? (My name is Charles. What's your name?)	Ninaitwa Mary. Nimefurahi kukujua. (My name is Mary. I'm pleased to know you.)
Unazungumza Kiswahili? (Do you speak Swahili?)	Ndio! Ninazungumza Kiswahili. (Yes! I speak Swahili.) Kidogo tu! (Just a little bit!) Hapana! Sizungumzi Kiswahili. Ninazungumza Kiingereza tu! (No! I don't speak Swahili. I only speak English!)
Ninatokea Marekani. Wewe unatokea wapi? (I'm from the United States of America. Where are you from?)	Ninatokea Japani. Nipo hapa kwa matembezi. (I'm from Japan. I'm visiting here.) Ninatokea Uingereza. Nipo hapa kwa kazi. (I'm from U.K. I'm here on business.) Ninatokea Ujerumani. Nimekuja kujifunza Kiswahili.

	(I'm from Germany. I've come to learn Swahili.)
Kwaheri! Nimefurahi kukutana na wewe. (Goodbye! I'm pleased to meet you.)	Karibu! Nimefurahi pia kukutana na wewe. (Goodbye! I'm also pleased to meet you.)
Utapenda kunywa nini? (What would you like to drink?)	Nitakunywa maji tu. Nina kiu sana! (I'll just drink water. I'm very thirsty.) Nitakunywa kahawa bila maziwa. (I'll drink coffee without milk.) Nitakunywa chai na maziwa na sukari kidogo. (I'll drink tea with milk and little sugar.) Nitakunywa soda. CocaCola, tafadhali. (I'll drink soda. CocaCola, please.)
Tafadhali niletee chakula moto haraka. Nina njaa sana! (Please bring me some hot food quickly. I'm very hungry!)	Huu hapa wali, samaki, mbatata, na saladi. Nitakuletea keki baadaye. (Here is rice, fish, potatoes, and salad. I'll bring you cake later.)

General Words and Phrases

English	Swahili
And	Na
Bad	Mbaya
Bicycle	Baiskeli
Bitter	Chungu
Car	Gari
Cold	Baridi
Danger	Hatari
Drink (noun)	Kinywaji
Drink (verb)	Kunywa
Eat	Kula
Excuse me!	Samahani!
Food	Chakula
Friend	Rafiki
Good	Nzuri
Goodbye!	Kwaheri!
Help me, please!	Nisaidie, tafadhali!
Here	Hapa

Hot	Moto
How?	Vipi?
I am angry.	Nimekasirika.
I am traveling.	Ninasafiri.
I am happy.	Nimefurahi.
I can speak Swahili.	Ninaweza kusema Kiswahili.
I can't speak Swahili.	Siwezi kusema Kiswahili.
I love you!	Ninakupenda!
Motorcycle	Pikipiki
No!	Hapana!
OK!	Sawa!
Please	Tafadhali
Sorry! (apologize)	Samahani!
Sorry! (sympathize)	Pole!
Sweet	Tamu
Thank you!	Asante!
Thank you very much!	Asante sana!
There	Pale
Very	Sana
Water	Maji
Welcome!	Karibu!
What?	Nini?
When?	Wakati gani?
Where?	Wapi?
Where are you going to?	Unakwenda wapi?
Which?	Ipi?
Yes!	Ndio!

Days of the Week

In Swahili, Saturday is the first day of the week. The sixth day of the week, Thursday, is mostly pronounced as "Alkhamisi" to match the way it is pronounced in its Arabic origin. Thursday and Friday both are of Arabic origin. They probably replaced the original Bantu names of those days due to their special place in the Islamic religion. Note that in Arabic, "Alkhamis" means the fifth day of the Arabic week while Thursday is actually the sixth day of the Swahili week! Sort of we ended up with two fifth days of the week: "Jumatano" and "Alkhamisi"!

English	Swahili

Saturday	Jumamosi (literally: first day of the week)
Sunday	Jumapili (literally: second day of the week)
Monday	Jumatatu (literally: third day of the week)
Tuesday	Jumanne (literally: fourth day of the week)
Wednesday	Jumatano (literally: fifth day of the week)
Thursday	Alhamisi (Arabic: fifth day of the week)
Friday	Ijumaa (Arabic: the day of congregational prayer)

Numbers

English	Swahili	English	Swahili
1	Moja	40	Arubaini
2	Mbili	50	Hamsini
3	Tatu	55	Hamsini na tano
4	Nne	60	Sitini
5	Tano	70	Sabini
6	Sita	80	Thamanini
7	Saba	90	Tisini
8	Nane	100	Mia
9	Tisa	136	Mia moja thalathini na sita
10	Kumi	999	Mia tisa tisini na tisa
11	Kumi na moja	1000	Elfu
12	Kumi na mbili	1997	Elfu moja mia tisa tisini na saba
17	Kumi na saba	Half	Nusu
20	Ishirini	Two and a half	Mbili na nusu
24	Ishirini na nne	Quarter	Robo
30	Thalathini	Forty seven and three quarters	Arubaini na saba na robo tatu

Time

It is interesting to note that in the Swahili culture the day starts at sunrise (unlike in the Arab world where the day starts at sunset, and in the Western world where the day starts at midnight). Sunrise in East Africa, being exactly at the Equator, happens every day at approximately 6:00 a.m. And for that reason, 6:00 a.m. is "0:00 morning" Swahili time. By "Swahili time" I mean the time as spoken in Swahili.

So the hands of a watch or clock meant to read Swahili time would always point to a number opposite to the number for the actual time as spoken in English. That is, the Swahili time anywhere in the world (not just East Africa) is delayed by 6 hours.

Therefore 7:00 a.m. is "1:00 morning" (saa moja asubuhi) Swahili time; midnight is "6:00 night" (saa sita usiku) Swahili time. 5:00 a.m. is "11:00 early morning" (saa kumi na moja alfajiri) Swahili time.







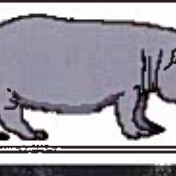


Note also that the Swahili time doesn't use "noon" as the reference as in a.m. (before noon) and p.m. (after noon). The time is spoken using "alfajiri" which is the early morning time during which the morning light has started to shine but the sun has not risen yet; "asubuhi" which is the morning time between sunrise and a little before noon; "mchana" which is from around noon to around 3:00 p.m.; "alasiri" which is from around 3:00 p.m. to sunset; "jioni" which is the entire time period from around 3:00 p.m. up to a little before 7:00 p.m.; and "usiku" which is the entire time period from around 7:00 p.m. to early morning.










English	Swahili
Time	Saa
Hour	Saa
Watch/Clock	Saa
Morning	Asubuhi
Evening	Jioni/Usiku
Afternoon	Mchana
Late afternoon	Alasiri/Jioni
Dusk	Magharibi
Night	Usiku
Late night	Usiku wa manane
Early morning	Alfajiri
What time is it?	Saa ngapi?
8 o'clock in the morning	Saa mbili kamili asubuhi
8 o'clock sharp	Saa mbili barabara
Noon	Saa sita mchana
4:25 p.m.	Saa kumi na dakika ishirini na tano alasiri
6:00 p.m.	Saa kumi na mbili kamili jioni
8:15 p.m.	Saa mbili na robo usiku
7:45 p.m.	Saa mbili kasorobo usiku
9:30 a.m.	Saa tatu unusu asubuhi (also: Saa tatu na nusu asubuhi)
Now	Sasa
Today	Leo
Yesterday	Jana
Tomorrow	Kesho
Day before yesterday	Juzi
Day after tomorrow	Kesho-kutwa
Day	Siku

Week	Wiki
Month	Mwezi
Year	Mwaka
Century	Karne

Animals

English	Picture	Swahili
Baboon		Nyani
Bird(s)		Ndege
Buffalo		Nyati
Cat		Paka
Cheetah		Duma
Chimpanzee		Sokwe
Cow/Ox		Ng'ombe
Deer		Paa

		
Dog		Mbwa
Donkey		Punda
Elephant		Tembo/Ndovu
Giraffe		Twiga
Goat		Mbuzi
Hippopotamus		Kiboko
Hyena		Fisi
Impala		Swala

Leopard		Chui
Lion		Simba
Monkey		Kima
Ostrich		Mbuni
Peacock		Tausi
Pig		Nguruwe
Python		Chatu
Rhinoceros		Kifaru
Sheep		Kondoo