

Modality in Swahili

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Modality is a universal phenomenon of language. Modality is the way in which a speaker can express his attitude towards a situation usually in interpersonal communication realized by different grammatical devices. Some grammars written on Swahili have dealt with modals and how they are used (Polome, 1967), (Loogman , 1965) , (Maw, 1985).

In this paper I attempt to summarize the semantic and structural features of modals in Kiswahili, both usage and form, in the standard dialect used in the official newspapers of Tanzania. The study is intended to be conclusive. However, it is hoped that researchers will draw attention to omissions and inaccuracies. The first part of this paper will identify the semantic features of modality in Kiswahili: obligation and necessity, possibility and ability, probability and likelihood and polite requests. The second part will provide the syntactic and morphological characteristics of modals in Kiswahili. Modals in Kiswahili are preverbal. However, if the speaker wants to emphasize, then the verb may precede the modal. Swahili has preserved the wide flexibility of Bantu word formation so that from the root we can derive a considerable number of words. The third part is the conclusion. It shows us that although Swahili is greatly influenced by Arabic in this area, the form and shape of Arabic words are adapted to the structure of Kiswahili as a Bantu Language. It is a well established fact in the study of Kiswahili and its development that foreign words and particularly Arabic expanded the Swahili vocabulary. However, this paper tries to show that although most Arabic loans have the strength to sustain their original meaning and content, some of these loans had to change into something different.