

## **Frequency-driven reduction and lexical diffusion in Swahili**

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*The paper focuses on phonological reduction in Standard Swahili observed in various morphophonological environments, especially in noun class markers and concord affixes. The process results in lexically specified allomorphy of particular grammatical morphemes alternating as ku~kw, tu~tw, ha~h, etc. I will demonstrate that the reduction is principally conditioned by high frequency of particular words. For example, the infinitival (class 15) prefix ku usually occurs in its full form, also before a vowel-initial stem, e.g. kuendelea 'to continue', kuimba 'to sing', kuambukiza 'to infect'. But in several lexical items of high frequency, the reduced variant kw is found, e.g. kwenda 'to go', kwisha 'to finish', kwamba 'that' (gramaticalized from \*kuamba 'to say').*

*Frequency-triggered reductions are functionally motivated by a recognized correlation between the size and frequency of a linguistic unit known as Zipf's Laws. They are also phonetically justified by increased overlapping of articulatory gestures in automatic neuromotor processing. A reductive change initiated in the contexts of high occurrence may spread on words of lower frequency by means of an analogical process of lexical diffusion. The dialectal data provide extensive evidence that reductions limited to a few items in the Standard language have a much wider scope in non-standardized dialects, e.g. Kimakunduchi kona 'to see' for St. Sw. kuona, Chichifundi koga 'bathe' for kuoga, Chimwiini kambi<sup>3</sup>a 'to say', cf. St. Sw. kuambiana 'to say to each other'.*

*The explanation of the Standard Swahili and dialectal data in terms of high frequency of use and lexical diffusion helps to understand a number of intriguing morphophonological alternations in this language. From a general perspective, the analysis contributes to a better comprehension of synchronic allomorphy and it also sheds light on the mechanism of historical phonological change.*