

# **Syntactic classification of Swahili verbal expressions**

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## **1. Introduction**

Verbal expressions express or describe single actions. Although by their nature, the meanings of verbal expressions cannot be deduced from the meanings of their component parts, they have a semantic and syntactic unity. In Swahili language, Swahili Verbal expressions which one of their syntactic structures is that of a verb followed by a noun [V + N] they function like lexical verbs in the sense that they basically express or describe single processes or actions and that both the speaker and the hearer have in mind one process only of an action and not that of a verb being followed by a noun which could be its patient, beneficiary or otherwise. For example in Swahili we have verbal expressions like: *piga pasi* 'iron (clothes)', *fua dafu* 'be able/manage', *tia utambi* 'instigate', *kufa moyo* 'dispair', *piga mkasi* 'cancel', *pata jiko* 'get married', *ezeka makofi* 'box/slap sb', *poa moto* 'relax', *acha mkono* 'die', etc.

## **2. What is the nature of verbal expression?**

Verbal expressions are just a small fraction of complex characteristics of a language. Hence the best way of handling them would be, firstly, to trace the evolution of language systems and, secondly, to examine briefly factors which contribute into the design of complex language systems we know of today.

Chafe (1970) asserts that:

Language is a system which mediates, in a highly complex way, between the universe of meaning and the universe of sound. On the one hand we have "things to say", on the other hand we make noises which, under ordinary circumstances, convey these things to a listener or listeners. language enables a speaker to transform configurations of ideas

into configurations of sounds, and it enables a listener within his own mind to transform these sounds back into a reasonable facsimile of the ideas with which the speaker began (p 15).

To elaborate the above quotation, one can say that a human being has ideas or thoughts “things to say”, hidden within himself which no any other individual could access them since they are invisible, untouchable and there is no any neural connection between individuals that could channel their transmission from one individual to another. However, since there was an urge to reveal individual thoughts to others and share ideas and experiences among individuals, the search for a device that could be used to transmit them was inevitable. Across the literature, there are a number of speculations as to why the device (language) chose sound to be the medium instead of sight, smell and touch. We don't need to discuss those speculations here. However, what is important to note is that, the invented communicative device named *language* is now used to bridge the communicative gap by converting ideas, thoughts, meanings etc. found in somebody's mind into sound symbols or signs that could easily be transmitted in the air and perceived by another individual through the auditory reception apparatus of an individual, i.e. an ear.

After the invention of the device (language) during time immemorial, the device evolved in different ways especially in matters relating to the relationship between ideas or thoughts (meaning) and sound images (symbols) and more importantly, the changes within sound images themselves.

In his discussion on the evolution of language, Chafe (1970) asserts that language systems as we know them today started as what he called “primitive symbolisation systems” (p 22). he described primitive symbolisation system as a system which “consists of a certain number of conceptual units and symbols, each of the former linked to one of the latter” (p 21). This means concept X is symbolised by a sound symbol Y. In addition, in this system, a single concept is transmitted at a time.

This observation is strongly supported by Land (1974) who asserts that:

The natural speech was at first monosyllabic and onomatopoeic. The very first words were representations of certain striking natural phenomena. This vocabulary was subsequently augmented by other classes of words - namely, in order of appearance, interjections, pronouns particles, nouns, and finally verbs” (p 56).

Although primitive symbolisation systems were used by our ancestors during time immemorial, they could still be observed amongst non-human primates since non-human symbolisation systems didn't evolve. They were limited to the

expression of very few basic concepts in the conceptual universe. The systems are used basically to transmit messages relating to emotions, danger and biological needs such as food and reproduction. Human primitive symbolisation systems, contrary to those of non-human primates, evolved. It came to be realised that the conceptual universe is larger, differentiated, structured and not limited to emotions and biological needs. Chafe (1970) observes that ‘through language man communicates not only the emotions and messages essential to his survival, but also to an endless array of states, relations, objects and events both internal and external to himself’ (p 24).

The expansion of the conceptual universe brought a challenge to the universe of sound and hence forced it to keep pace with the developments in the conceptual universe. Therefore, a great number of sound symbols were formed to the extent that now human symbolisation systems contain greater number of conceptual units and their corresponding sound symbols than any other natural communication systems.

However, in the process of expanding the conceptual universe and the universe of sound (symbols) some problems arise. Firstly, the expansion of the conceptual universe not only created a great number of differentiated conceptual units, but also in some cases it made the boundaries of the conceptual units to be elastic, hence not having clear demarcations. Secondly, due to the influx of conceptual units, the practice of attaching one sound unit (symbol) to a particular conceptual unit was neither possible nor economical any more. In addition, the practice of transmitting one concept at a time was impracticable. Therefore, one sound unit could represent more than one conceptual unit or vice versa and a number of concepts could be transmitted at the same time. This made the human communication systems to be more complex compared to the primitive ones. Thirdly, although the conceptual universe could be expanded and differentiated indefinitely, the universe of sounds became limited in some ways. Each language system has an inventory of sounds and these sounds can be combined in different ways to form different sound symbols. But due to the fact that the inventories of sounds of the language systems are very limited, there are cases where certain created sound symbols become so similar that to keep them apart in terms of production, reception and perception is a great challenge. Due to this limitation, the conceptual universe became larger compared to the universe of symbols. So in order to keep pace with the universe of concepts, fundamental changes had to take place in the entire language system in order to accommodate new developments.

Firstly, there developed a change in the concept-symbol relationship. Instead of limiting the relationship to one-to-one correspondence, that is sound A to symbolise concept X only, the new development changed this relationship

in the sense that, in certain instances sound A could symbolise concepts X, Y and Z. These changes had the effect of expanding the universe of sound in order to cope with the expanding universe of concepts. To illustrate the point, in Swahili, for example.

**paa**

*n.* 1. gazelle, esp. of the very small species, impala. 2. (of house, hut etc.) roof.

*vt.* 1. convey fire. 2 (of fish) scrape (scales). 3 ascend . 4 rise.

**kaa**

*n.* 1. crab. 2 ember. 3 charcoal.

*vt.* 1. sit down. 2 remain. 3 dwell. 4 last.

Secondly, there developed the use of figures of speech, idioms and metaphors. This development also had the effect of expanding the inventory of the universe of sound symbols. Land (1974) observes that in the 18th century, critics and philosophers argued that metaphors were integral to language and that they are “a direct consequence of the conditions under which language first arouse, i.e the need to express a constantly increasing diversity of concepts and the paucity of words in early vocabularies (p 56). Chafe (1970) commenting on the evolution of language, states categorically that:

new semantic units need some way of being converted into sound. They need not, however, acquire a sound which is distinctively their own, but may avail themselves of the fact that there are other semantic units which already have established symbolisation. ... A semantic unit one which does not have a direct symbolisation of its own but which trades on the symbolisation of another (or others) can be *called an idiom* (pp 41-44).

Therefore, following the above discussion, one can assert that figures of speech, idioms and metaphors are a natural product of both a language system in speaker’s mind and a meagre vocabulary in the universe of sound.

### **3. Evolution vs verbal expressions**

Now we come back to our original question ‘What is the nature of verbal expressions? We have established that verbal expressions are idioms. This means they don’t have symbolisation of their own, but they operate on the symbolisation of other conceptual units. This feature is not unique to verbal

expressions only. It is a feature which could also be assumed by other idiomatic expression types of *individual lexical items*.

In our discussion, we have established that idioms came into existence as a strategy to counter the paucity of symbols. Therefore, since verbal expressions are idioms we assert that they came into existence in order to expand the universe of symbols stricken by a meagre vocabulary. This point can be substantiated in many ways. TUKI'S (1981) *Kamusi ya Kiswahili sanifu* (*Standard Swahili dictionary*) could be one source of evidence. By just making a quick perusal of the dictionary taking one letter at a time, one could easily discover that nouns in this dictionary outnumber verbs by far. This shows that there is a paucity of verbs in the Swahili language. Therefore, in order to cope with this deficiency, the language system forms verbal expressions which function like lexical verbs.

In conclusion, we assert that verbal expressions and other idiomatic expressions of that nature came into existence as a strategy on the part of language systems to counter the paucity of vocabulary. There are different strategies being used in handling paucity in different grammatical categories and that different language systems used different strategies in solving identical deficiencies in a language. However, verbal expressions and other idiomatic expression types have been devised to counter the paucity of vocabulary in language systems.

#### **4. Idiomatic expression types**

Bolinger (1975) defines an idiomatic expression as 'a group of words with set meanings that cannot be calculated by adding up the separate meanings of the parts. Greenberg (1966, p 184) defines an idiom as 'a grammatically complex expression A+B whose designatum is not completely expressible in terms of the designata A and B respectively'. Chafe (1970, p 44) in his long discussion of idioms asserts that 'a semantic unit .... one which does not have a direct symbolisation of its own but which trades on the symbolisation of another (or others) can be called an idiom'. Mitchell (1975, p 125) defines an idiom as "an entity whose meaning cannot be deduced from its parts". With such kind of broad definitions and by using syntactic and semantic devices, idiomatic expression (idioms) can be categorised into different idiom types.

In the *Oxford dictionary of current idiomatic English*, Cowie, Mackin & McCaig advocate that "there are enormous structural variety of English idioms" (p xi). But, syntactically, they could be categorised into three main types: phrase idioms, clause idioms and sentence idioms. While sentence idioms are said to have simple and complex patterns e.g. *one swallow does not make a summer* and

*give somebody an inch and he'll take a mile* respectively, the phrase idioms have the following common patterns:

- Nouns Phrase, e.g. *a crashing bore*
- Adjectival Phrase, e.g. *free with one's money*
- Prepositional Phrase, e.g. *in the nick of time*
- Adverbial Phrase e.g. *as often as not*

The clause idioms have the following common patterns:

- Verb + preposition<sup>1</sup> e.g. *take in, take out*
- Verb + particle<sup>2</sup> e.g. *make up, come to*
- Verb + complement, e.g. *go berserk*
- Verb + direct object, e.g. *ease sb's conscience/mind*
- Verb + direct object + complement, e.g. *paint the town red*
- Verb + direct object + indirect object, e.g. *do sb credit*
- Verb + direct object + Adjunct, e.g. *take sth amiss*

But as far as semantic analysis is concerned, Cowie et al (1982, 1983), categorised idiomatic expressions into four types:

- (i) Pure idioms: e.g. *blow the gaff; kick the bucket*

These are idioms which have been established through 'constant re-use, then undergo figurative extension and finally petrify or congeal'.

- (ii) Figurative idioms: e.g. *catch fire; close ranks*

These are idioms which have both figurative meanings and literal meanings. They are distinguished from open collocations (cf. iv below) as variation is seldom found.

- (iii) Restricted collocations: e.g. *jog one's memory, blind alley*

These idioms are sometimes referred to as '*semi-idioms*' as for example, in case of two-word expressions, one word has a figurative sense restricted in a limited context, while the other word has a normal literal sense.

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<sup>1</sup> Frans Liefrank (1973) categorized such idioms as idiomatic phrasal verbs.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

(iv) Open collocation: e.g. *fill the sink; a broken window*

These are idioms whose component parts of verb and object or adjective and nouns, in addition to being used in a common literal sense, they could be freely recombined. For example, in the case of the idiom *fill the sink*, the verb *fill* can be recombined with the object *basin* or *bucket* as in *fill the basin* and *fill the bucket*, and the object *sink* can be recombined with the verb *empty* or *drain* as in *empty the sink* and *drain the sink*.

Therefore, Cowie et al (1982/83) used the concept ‘idiom’ without distinction as to pattern. He claims that “idiomaticity is largely or semantic matter and that it is manifested in much the same way in expressions of different structural types” (p xi)

## 5. Syntactic classification

There are nine different types of verbal expressions in Swahili which can be divided into two main categories. The first category comprised odd constructions (not well-formed constructions) and the second category comprised well-formed constructions. There are six construction types in the first category and three construction types in the second category. The classification is based on a collection of about 300 verbal expressions. In order to get more insights, various devices that are used in forming Swahili verbal expressions are also discussed.

### 5.1 Odd constructions

The formation of odd constructions in Swahili is one of the devices that are used in forming verbal expressions. In Swahili, six types of verbal expressions are formed by using this device as discussed below:

#### 5.1.1 Verb + Instrument — [V {+transitive} + N {+instrument}]

Verbal expressions of this type are illustrated in (1) below:

(1) Verbal expressions of the type [verb + instrument]

|                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Piga pasi</i>    | ‘iron clothes’        |
| <i>Piga mswaki</i>  | ‘clean one’s teeth’   |
| <i>Piga jeki</i>    | ‘support/assist (sb)’ |
| <i>Piga bomba</i>   | ‘syringe’             |
| <i>Piga sindano</i> | ‘give an injection’   |

|                    |                                      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Piga brashi</i> | ‘brush one’s shoes’                  |
| <i>Piga simu</i>   | ‘telephone’, ‘make a telephone call’ |

By using the principles of generative transformational grammar, one can claim that the verbal expressions illustrated in (1) above are short forms of well-formed verb phrases whose structure is that of [VERB -plus- OBJECT -plus- PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE] formalized here as [V + N + PP]. One can argue that verbal expressions in (1) above are generated respectively from verb phrases illustrated in (2) below:

(2) Verbal phrases of the type [V + N + PP]

|                                 |                                       |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Nyoosha nguo kwa pasi</i>    | ‘straighten clothes by using an iron’ |
| <i>Safisha meno kwa mswaki</i>  | ‘clean teeth by using a tooth brush’  |
| <i>Amsha (gari) kwa jeki</i>    | ‘lift (a vehicle) by using a jack’    |
| <i>Safisha sikio kwa bomba</i>  | ‘clean an ear by using a syringe’     |
| <i>Tia dawa kwa sindano</i>     | ‘inject medicine by using a syringe’  |
| <i>Safisha viatu kwa brashi</i> | ‘clean shoes by using a brush’        |
| <i>Peleka ujumbe kwa simu</i>   | ‘send a message by using a telephone’ |

The long well-formed verb phrases of the type [V + N + PP] illustrated in (2) can be shortened to [Verb + Instrument] constructions as illustrated in (1). This process could be achieved by effecting different transformations on the well-formed verb phrases. Firstly, their underlying verbs are dropped and replaced by other conventional verb(s). In the case of verbal expressions illustrated in (1) above, the conventional verb *piga* ‘beat, hit, kick’ replaces the underlying verbs: *nyoosha* ‘straighten’, *safisha* ‘clean’, *amsha* ‘lift’, *chapa* ‘beat’, *endesha* ‘drive/set in motion’, *tia* ‘put’ and *peleka* ‘send’. This act of substituting the conventional verb *piga* for the underlying verbs is one of the reasons for yielding odd constructions. In such constructions, the verb *piga* is taken as a convention that means ‘apply’ or ‘use’.

In the second operation, the object of the underlying verb and the preposition of the underlying prepositional phrase are dropped. After the deletion transformation has taken place, the conventional verb *piga* is ultimately followed by a noun, which originally was the object of the underlying prepositional phrase. The process of moving the object of a preposition, sub-categorized here as [+instrument], from the object position of a prepositional phrase to the object position of a verb phrase is another cause for yielding odd constructions. The constructions sound odd because the verb *piga* violates selectional restriction rules. Conventionally, the resulting verbal expressions



sound like *apply or use sth expressed by the noun* and they are interpreted as idioms expressing single processes or actions.

To conclude, one can say that the process of substituting the conventional verb *piga* (for example) for a VERB in a particular VERB PHRASE of the structure [V + N + PP] and then (after a deletion transformation) be followed by a NOUN which in the underlying structure was an OBJECT of a PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE, yield odd constructions. However, the verb phrases generated in this way are conventionally accepted as idiomatic expressions which express single actions or processes as illustrated in (2) above.

### 5.1.2 Verb + Patient — [ V {+transitive} + N {+patient} ]

Verbal expressions of this type are illustrated in (3) below:

#### (3) Verbal expressions of the type [verb + patient]

|                     |                            |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>vunja nia</i>    | ‘change one’s mind’        |
| <i>vuta akili</i>   | ‘think’                    |
| <i>kata urafiki</i> | ‘sever friendly relations’ |
| <i>piga maji</i>    | ‘drink alcohol’            |
| <i>kata mate</i>    | ‘flabbergast someone’      |
| <i>vunja moyo</i>   | ‘discourage someone’       |
| <i>vuta subira</i>  | ‘exercise patience’        |
| <i>vuta macho</i>   | ‘attract’                  |

In forming verbal expressions of the type [verb + patient] as in (3) above, the verbs have to violate the selectional restriction rules. For example, in order for the verb *vunja* ‘to break’ in (3) above to generate well-formed constructions, it needs to be followed by nouns sub-categorized as [+concrete], as illustrated in (4) below.

#### (4) Well-formed verb phrases with *vunja* [V {+transitive} + N {+patient +concrete}]

|                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| <i>vunja fimbo</i>   | ‘break a stick’     |
| <i>vunja jiwe</i>    | ‘break a stone’     |
| <i>vunja mlango</i>  | ‘break a door’      |
| <i>vunja kikombe</i> | ‘break a cup’       |
| <i>vunja chuma</i>   | ‘break an iron bar’ |

But the verb *vunja* in the verbal expression *vunja nia* illustrated in (3) above is followed by the noun *nia* ‘intention, thought, mind’, which is not [+concrete], but [-concrete]. This violation of selectional restriction rules is used as a device

for forming verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Patient] as illustrated in (3) above.

### 5.1.3 Verb + Complement — [V {-transitive; +stative} + N {+complement}]

Verbal expressions of this type are illustrated in (5) below:

(5) Verbal expressions of the type [verb + complement]

*Vunjika moyo* ‘be disheartened, be discouraged’

*Vunjika nia* ‘be discouraged’

In forming verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Complement], the violation of selectional restriction rules is also applied here. The verb *vunjika* ‘be broken’ in the verbal expressions *vunjika moyo* and *vunjika nia* is a stative derivative of the verb *vunja* ‘to break’. According to selectional restriction rules, the verb *vunjika* has to be followed by a noun sub-categorized as [+concrete] and [+breakable]. But in the two expressions illustrated in (5) above, the verb *vunjika* in the first expression is followed by the noun *moyo* ‘heart’ which is [-breakable] and in the second expression is followed by the noun *nia* ‘intention’, which is [-concrete] and [-breakable]. Therefore, to collocate the verb *vunjika* with the noun *moyo* or *nia* violates selectional restriction rules.

### 5.1.4 Verb + Agent — [V{-transitive}] + PP [P + N{+agent, -concrete}]]

Verbal expressions of this type are illustrated in (6) below:

(6) Verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Agent]

*Pigwa na bumbuazi* ‘be amazed’

*Shikwa na homa* ‘catch a fever’

*Shikwa na mafua* ‘catch a cold’

*Shikwa na njaa* ‘be hungry, starve’

*Shikwa na kiu* ‘feel thirst’

In forming verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Agent], the device that is used is also the violation of selectional restriction rules. The violation yields odd constructions but acceptable idiomatic expressions. In example (6) above, the verbs *pigwa* and *shikwa* are passive verbs. When they are followed by prepositional phrases, the object of the preposition is the agent of the passive construction. Again, based on the selectional restriction rules for the verbs *pigwa* ‘be beaten’ and *shikwa* ‘be captured, be seized, be grasped’, the object of the preposition (the agent of the passive construction) should have the features

[+concrete] as illustrated in (7) below:

- (7) Well-formed verbal constructions of the type [Verb + PP] / [V{+passive}] + PP [P + N{+agent, +concrete}]
- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Pigwa na mwalimu</i> | ‘beaten by a teacher’     |
| <i>Pigwa na fimbo</i>   | ‘beaten/hit with a stick’ |
| <i>Pigwa na jiwe</i>    | ‘hit with a stone’        |
| <i>Shikwa na askari</i> | ‘captured by the police’  |

The phrases in (7) are well-formed constructions, hence not idiomatic expressions. In order to form verbal expressions like those illustrated in (6) above, the selectional restriction rules for verbs should be violated. This means, for example, instead of the verb to be followed by a prepositional phrase whose object has the feature [+concrete], the object will have the feature [-concrete].

Therefore, in forming verbal expressions of type [Verb + Agent], some form of selectional restriction rules should be violated. For example, the nouns which are inserted in the object position of a prepositional phrase should have the feature [-concrete] instead of the feature [+concrete].

### 5.1.5 Verb + Predicate attribute — [V {Be} + Predicate attribute]

Verbal expressions of this type are illustrated in (8) below:

- (8) Verbal expressions of the type [Verb{be} + Predicate attribute]
- |                     |                                  |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Kuwa sugu</i>    | ‘be stubborn’                    |
| <i>Kuwa macho</i>   | ‘be cautious, be alert’          |
| <i>Kuwa chakari</i> | ‘be exceedingly drunk’           |
| <i>Kuwa mwingi</i>  | ‘be well-informed, be sagacious’ |
| <i>Kuwa waya</i>    | ‘be broke’                       |

The verbal form *-wa* ‘to be’, or ‘to become’ is a monosyllabic verb which when used in the past tense, past perfect tense and future tense, it has to occur with the infinitive prefix *ku-*. For example:

|                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Alikuwa sugu</i> | ‘he was stubborn’         |
| <i>Amekuwa sugu</i> | ‘he has become stubborn’  |
| <i>Atakuwa sugu</i> | ‘he will become stubborn’ |

Notice that the prefix *a-* in the three sentences denotes *third person singular* and the prefixes *li*, *me* and *ta*, are tense markers for: past tense, present perfect tense

and future tense respectively. The present tense uses the copula form *ni* instead of *-wa*. For example: *Mtoto ni sugu* ‘the child is stubborn’. In addition, when a relative particle is used, e.g. *ye*, the verb form *li-* is used instead of *-wa* in affirmative sentences. For example:

|                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Mtoto aliye sugu</i>      | ‘the child who is stubborn’           |
| <i>Mtu aliye chakari</i>     | ‘the person who is exceedingly drunk’ |
| <i>Mfanyakazi aliye waya</i> | ‘the worker who is broke’             |

Therefore, the concept represented by the verbal form *-wa* ‘to be’, or ‘to become’, can be expressed in different linguistic contexts by using different forms such as: *kuwa*, *ni* or *-li-*.

In forming verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Predicate attribute] formalized here as [ V {Be} + Predicate attribute], the device which is being used is basically the violation of selectional restriction rules of the verb *-wa*. For example, a person cannot become or be plentiful, an electric wire or a callosity. So, when such attributes are used, they yield odd constructions. However, they are taken as acceptable idiomatic expressions.

### 5.1.6 Verb + Outcome — [ V{+transitive} + N {-instrument}]

Verbal expressions of this type of construction are illustrated in (9) below:

#### (9) Verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Outcome]

|                      |                                 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Piga mbizi</i>    | ‘dive’                          |
| <i>Piga mbio</i>     | ‘run’                           |
| <i>Piga miayo</i>    | ‘yawn’                          |
| <i>Piga mluzi</i>    | ‘whistle’                       |
| <i>Piga kura</i>     | ‘cast lots’                     |
| <i>Piga makofi</i>   | ‘clap the hands, box sb’s ears’ |
| <i>Piga deki</i>     | ‘mop’                           |
| <i>Piga chafya</i>   | ‘sneeze’                        |
| <i>Piga porojo</i>   | ‘have an idle chatter’          |
| <i>Piga usingizi</i> | ‘sleep’                         |
| <i>Piga umbea</i>    | ‘gossip’                        |
| <i>Piga kisi</i>     | ‘kiss’                          |

Verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Outcome] use nouns as basic semantic elements for determining their meanings. Swahili vocabulary has a set of nouns which express or name the outcome of certain actions or processes, but have no

corresponding lexical verbs that express their respective actions or processes. For example, nouns such as *mbizi* ‘a dive’, *chafya* ‘a sneeze’, *kisi* ‘a kiss’, *mluzi* ‘a whistle’ and *mwayo* ‘a yawn’, have no corresponding lexical verbs which express, for example, the act of making a dive, a kiss, a whistle or a yawn. These lexical gaps are filled by the use of verbal expressions.

In forming verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Outcome], two main procedures are involved. The first procedure is to choose lexical verbs whose meanings could idiomatically be interpreted as ‘the making of...’ or ‘the act of performing...’ or ‘the process of...’. In our case at hand, *piga* is the most favoured verb in Swahili. Over and above its prototypical meanings, i.e. ‘strike, beat, hit, give a blow’, it could idiomatically be interpreted as denoting the idiomatic senses mentioned above. The second procedure is to collocate the verb *piga* with those nouns which name the outcome of actions or processes. The resulting constructions are idioms that express the actions, processes or states suggested by the nouns as illustrated in (9) above.

Although the verb *piga* is the most favoured verb in forming Verb + Outcome constructions, its literal meanings are not used in verbal expressions. When the verb *piga* is used to denote its literal meanings of ‘strike, beat, hit, give a blow’, it is supposed to be followed by nouns which are [+concrete] as illustrated in (10) below.

(10) Well-formed verb phrases of the verb *piga*

|                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| <i>Piga mtoto</i> | ‘beat a child’ |
| <i>Piga ngoma</i> | ‘beat a drum’  |
| <i>Piga mpira</i> | ‘kick a ball’  |
| <i>Piga ngumi</i> | ‘give a blow’  |

When the verb *piga* is used to denote its idiomatic meaning of ‘the making of...’ or ‘the act of performing...’ or ‘the process of...’ in verbal expressions, it violates its selectional restriction rules. Instead of being followed by nouns which are [+concrete], it is followed by nouns which are [-concrete]. By doing so, its literal meanings are not activated, but instead the expressions trigger senses suggested by the following nouns. For example: *Piga mbizi* will not mean ‘beat/hit a dive’, but ‘dive’ or literally ‘make a dive’; *Piga mluzi* will not mean ‘beat/hit a whistle’, but ‘whistle’ or literally ‘make a whistle’; and *Piga chafya* will not mean ‘beat/hit a sneeze’, but ‘sneeze’ or literally ‘make a sneeze’.

### 5.1.7 Summary

This section has identified the following six types of verbal expressions:

- (a) Verb + Instrument  
[ V {+transitive} + N {+instrument} ]
- (b) Verb + Patient  
[ V {+transitive} + N {+patient} ]
- (c) Verb + Complement  
[ V {-transitive,+stative} + N {+complement} ]
- (d) Verb + Agent  
[ V {-transitive} ] + PP [P + N{+agent, -concrete}]]
- (e) Verb + Predicate attribute  
[V {Be} + Predicate attribute]
- (f) Verb + Outcome  
[V {+transitive} + N {-instrument; -concrete}]

We have observed that the violation of selectional restriction rules has been a major device in forming the six types of verbal expressions discussed above. Although the resulting constructions are at the surface level seen as odd constructions, they are interpreted as idioms expressing single actions. Hence, in principle, the formation of odd constructions as discussed above should be taken as a syntactic method of triggering idiomatic interpretations. However, by using devices other than the violation of selectional restriction rules, well-formed constructions could also be used to form verbal expressions as discussed below.

### 5.2 Well-formed constructions (with non-literal meanings)

In the section dealing with odd constructions, we have observed that the formation of odd constructions has been a major device in the formation of verbal expressions in Swahili. However, there is data which show that well-formed constructions could also be used as idiomatic expressions. This means a different device should be applied to ensure that the well-formed constructions do not trigger literal interpretations but idiomatic ones. This decisive device is nothing else, but the use of well-formed constructions in *non-prototypical*

*contexts of situation.*

To illustrate the point, let us consider the verb phrase *chupa mipaka*. The verb *chupa* means ‘jump down from above or jump from branch to branch in a tree’. The noun *mipaka* (sing. *mpaka*) means ‘boundaries, limits, borders’. Therefore, the verb phrase *chupa mipaka* literally means ‘trespass, break bounds or cross borders’. Notice that the prototypical context of use of the phrase under discussion is that of *physical* (*boundaries, limits, or borders*). When the phrase *chupa mipaka* is used in these prototypical contexts, it is given a literal meaning. However, the same phrase could be used in non-prototypical contexts of use. For example, the phrase could be used in contexts relating to behaviour, deeds or attitudes. These contexts have *non-physical* (*boundaries, limits or borders*). In such contexts the verb phrase *chupa mipaka* would not be interpreted literally but idiomatically. Therefore, if someone says: *Juma amechupa mipaka* ‘Juma has crossed borders’ and in this particular case s/he is referring to Juma’s behaviour, it would mean that ‘Juma has gone beyond the limits of good behaviour’, which means ‘he is misbehaving’. There are three types of well-formed verb-phrase structures, whose constructions if used outside their prototypical contexts they could trigger idiomatic interpretations. The three verb-phrase structures are:

- Verb + Patient
- Be (Kuwa na ) + Patient
- Verb + Adverbial

### 5.2.1 Verb + Patient — [V{+transitive} + N {+patient}]

Verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Patient] are formed from well-formed verb phrases such as those in (11) below.

(11) Well-formed verb phrases of the type [Verb + Patient]

|                         |                                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Chapa miguu</i>      | ‘stamp on the ground’                 |
| <i>Chungulia kaburi</i> | ‘peep/cast a glance at a tomb’        |
| <i>Fumba jicho</i>      | ‘close the eye’                       |
| <i>Fyata mkia</i>       | ‘put the tail between the legs’       |
| <i>Fyata ulimi</i>      | ‘keep one’s tongue between the teeth’ |
| <i>Jipalia mkaa</i>     | ‘convey live embers near oneself’     |
| <i>Kula mumbi</i>       | ‘eat <i>mumbi</i> (a bad-omen bird)’  |
| <i>Kunja uso</i>        | ‘knit the brows’                      |
| <i>Mwaga unga</i>       | ‘pour out flour’                      |
| <i>Ng’oa hema</i>       | ‘strike a tent’                       |

|                      |                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Ng'oa nanga</i>   | 'weigh anchor'               |
| <i>Ota mbawa</i>     | 'grow feathers'              |
| <i>Pa mikoba</i>     | 'hand in bags to sb'         |
| <i>Pa mkono</i>      | 'shake hands with sb'        |
| <i>Paka mafuta</i>   | 'smear with oil'             |
| <i>Panda mwamba</i>  | 'run on a rock'              |
| <i>Poa moto</i>      | 'become cool'                |
| <i>Shika miguu</i>   | 'hold/grasp someone's feet'  |
| <i>Shika Sikio</i>   | 'hold/grasp someone's ear'   |
| <i>Shika tama</i>    | 'rest the cheek on the hand' |
| <i>Tupa mtoto</i>    | 'throw away a child'         |
| <i>Uma meno</i>      | 'gnash'                      |
| <i>Vaa miwani</i>    | 'put on eye-glasses'         |
| <i>Visha kilemba</i> | 'put a turban on sb'         |
| <i>Vimba kichwa</i>  | 'have a swollen head'        |

The meanings of the well-formed constructions indicated above are literal meanings which have been deduced from their prototypical contexts of use. When these well-formed verb phrases are used in contexts which are not prototypical to them, they form idiomatic expressions such as those in (12) below.

(12) Verbal expressions (with idiomatic meanings)

|                         |                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Chapa miguu</i>      | 'tramp'                           |
| <i>Chungulia kaburi</i> | 'be at jaws of death'             |
| <i>Fumba jicho</i>      | 'have a nap or respite'           |
| <i>Fyata mkia</i>       | 'hold the tongue, be frightened'  |
| <i>Fyata ulimi</i>      | 'shut up'                         |
| <i>Jipalia mkaa</i>     | 'endanger oneself'                |
| <i>Kata maini</i>       | 'hurt the feelings of'            |
| <i>Kula mumbi</i>       | 'suffer; meet misfortune'         |
| <i>Kunja uso</i>        | 'frown'                           |
| <i>Mwaga unga</i>       | 'lose a job'                      |
| <i>Ng'oa hema</i>       | 'depart; set out on a journey'    |
| <i>Ng'oa nanga</i>      | 'depart; go away'                 |
| <i>Ota mbawa</i>        | 'be arrogant; be conceited'       |
| <i>Pa mikoba</i>        | 'hand over responsibility'        |
| <i>Pa mkono</i>         | 'congratulate; condole with'      |
| <i>Paka mafuta</i>      | 'flatter'                         |
| <i>Panda mwamba</i>     | 'make a loss', (ship)'go aground' |



|                     |                                   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Poa moto</i>     | ‘relax; be cool’                  |
| <i>Shika miguu</i>  | ‘salute; pay honour to’           |
| <i>Shika sikio</i>  | ‘reprimand’                       |
| <i>Shika tama</i>   | ‘be in deep thought’              |
| <i>Tupa mtoto</i>   | ‘abandon a child’                 |
| <i>Uma meno</i>     | ‘take a vow of revenge’           |
| <i>Vaa miwani</i>   | ‘be drunk’                        |
| <i>Vika kilemba</i> | ‘flatter someone’                 |
| <i>Vimba kichwa</i> | ‘get swollen-headed, be arrogant’ |

The constructions in (11) above are well-formed verb phrases whose verbs abide by selectional restriction rules that constrain the choice of the nouns that follow them. In addition, their semantic interpretations render literal meanings as their contexts of use are prototypical to them. However, the constructions in (12) above are verbal expressions formed from well-formed verb phrases shown in (11), but their meanings have been deduced from contexts of use which are outside their prototypical contexts of use. This process of using well-formed constructions outside their prototypical contexts of use is a device which constrains the well-formed constructions from being interpreted literally, but idiomatically.

### 5.2.2 **Be (Kuwa na) + Patient — [Be{kuwa na} + N{+patient}]**

Verbal expressions of the type [Kuwa na + Patient] are formed from the well-formed verb phrases such as those in (13) below.

#### (13) Well-formed verb phrases of the type [Kuwa na + Patient]

|                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Kuwa na faragha</i>        | ‘have privacy’            |
| <i>Kuwa na kichwa kichafu</i> | ‘have a dirty head’       |
| <i>Kuwa na kichwa kigumu</i>  | ‘have a hard /stiff head’ |
| <i>Kuwa na macho makavu</i>   | ‘have dry eyes’           |
| <i>Kuwa na mkono mrefu</i>    | ‘have a long arm’         |
| <i>Kuwa na moyo mzito</i>     | ‘have a heavy heart’      |
| <i>Kuwa na moyo thabiti</i>   | ‘have a strong heart’     |
| <i>Kuwa na nafasi</i>         | ‘have a spare time’       |

The discussion we had in (1) under odd constructions, applies here as well. The meanings assigned to the well-formed verb phrases in (13) above are literal meanings deduced from their prototypical contexts of use. In order to form verbal expressions, the verb phrases in (13) should be used in contexts of use

which are not prototypical to them. The shift of contexts of use from prototypical contexts to non-prototypical contexts would yield verbal expressions such as those in (14) below.

(14) Verbal Expressions (with idiomatic meanings)

|                               |                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Kuwa na faragha</i>        | ‘have a private chart (with sb)’ |
| <i>Kuwa na kichwa kichafu</i> | ‘be nasty/stubborn’              |
| <i>Kuwa na kichwa kikubwa</i> | ‘be arrogant/boastful’           |
| <i>Kuwa na macho makavu</i>   | ‘be impudent’                    |
| <i>Kuwa na mkono mrefu</i>    | ‘be a thief’                     |
| <i>Kuwa na moyo mzito</i>     | ‘be cruel’                       |
| <i>Kuwa na moyo thabiti</i>   | ‘be firm/strong/brave’           |
| <i>Kuwa na nafasi</i>         | ‘be affluent’                    |

The verbal expressions shown in (13) above have literal meanings but those shown in (14) have idiomatic meanings. This observation attests the fact that the shift in the context of use from prototypical contexts to non-prototypical contexts is a linguistic device that is applied in forming verbal expressions.

### 5.2.3 Verb + Adverbial — [V{+/-transitive} + Adverbial]

Verbal expressions of the type [Verb + Adverbial] are formed from well-formed verb phrases such as those in (15) below.

(15) Well-formed verb phrases of the type [Verb + Adverbial]

|                      |                                         |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <i>Enda mrama</i>    | ‘pitch, toss’ (of a sea vessel)         |
| <i>Enda pembeni</i>  | ‘step by the side’                      |
| <i>Enda sambamba</i> | ‘go parallel’                           |
| <i>Enda uwani</i>    | ‘go to the back yard’                   |
| <i>Tia hatiani</i>   | ‘cause (sb) to commit crime/fault/sin.’ |

The meanings of verb phrases shown in (15) above are literal meanings as they are used in their prototypical contexts of use. If these verb phrases are used outside their prototypical contexts, they yield idiomatic expressions such as those in (16) below.

(16) Verbal expressions (with idiomatic meanings)

|                      |                               |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Enda mrama</i>    | ‘be in a mess, be in trouble’ |
| <i>Enda pembeni</i>  | ‘attend a call of nature’     |
| <i>Enda sambamba</i> | ‘get alone well’              |

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Enda uwani</i>  | ‘attend a call of nature’ |
| <i>Tia hatiani</i> | ‘convict sb’              |

The structure in (16) under well-formed constructions above would always generate well-formed constructions as those in (15) above. However, in order to make such constructions to be idiomatic expressions as in (16) above, they have to be used in contexts which are not prototypical to them. This shift of contexts of use, from prototypical to non-prototypical makes them not to be interpreted literally but idiomatically.

#### 5.2.4 Summary

In this section we have identified three well-formed verb-phrase structures which could be used to form verbal expressions. These structures are:

- Verb + Patient
- Be{Kuwa na} + Patient
- Verb + Adverbial

This section has attested that the device which is being used in forming the three types of verbal expressions is the shift of contexts of use from prototypical contexts of use to non-prototypical contexts of use. We have observed that the structures used to form the three construction types are well-formed verb phrases and render literal meanings when used in their prototypical contexts. In order for such verb phrases to become verbal expressions, they have to be used in contexts which are not prototypical to them.

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