

Chapter 15

Comparatives and Superlatives

Comparatives and comparative adjectives have the same use in Swahili as in English, to compare two nouns to each other. There are only two main categories of comparatives. The first category is comparatives of equality where two things are compared to show that they have an equal quality to each other. The second category is comparatives of superiority/inferiority where two things are compared to show one as superior or inferior to the other. In addition to comparative adjectives, the Swahili language has superlatives and superlative adjectives which have the same use in Swahili as in English. Superlatives are used to show that something has the maximum degree of a quality compared to anything else in that context or category.

Section A: Comparatives of Equality

In Swahili comparatives of equality can be made in several ways and using many different words. The most common ways involve comparative adjectives or certain verbs which will be shown below:

The word *kama* can be used to make the comparative of equality “as . . . as,” for example:

Kijana huyu ni shujaa kama mwanajeshi. – This youth is as brave as a soldier.

The following words can be used with or without *kama*:

vilevile – also

sawa – equal (to/in)

sawasawa – same

Sisi tunasoma Kiswahili vilevile. – We study Swahili also.

Mazulia yale ni sawa kwa sifa. – Those carpets are equal in quality.

Televisheni na kompyuta zinatumia kiasi sawasawa cha umeme.
– A television and a computer use the same amount of electricity.

Another way to make a comparative of equality is with *sawa na* which means “equal to.”

Miwani yangu ya jua ni sawa na yako. – My sunglasses are the same as yours.

The verb *lingana* meaning “match” or “harmonize” and the verb *fanana* meaning “resemble” can be used with or without *kama*:

Urefu wako unalingana na urefu wa mpenzi wako. – Your height matches with your girlfriend’s height.

Sura za mapacha hawa zinafanana. – The faces of these twins resemble (each other).

Practice Exercise A

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

1. Hindi is as difficult a language as the English language.
2. Her nose resembles my nose.
3. We are writing a Swahili book also.
4. She is as light as a feather.
5. It rained just as strongly (heavily) as yesterday.

Section B: Comparatives of Superiority or Inferiority

In Swahili comparatives of superiority/inferiority can be made in several ways and using many different words. The most common ways involve comparative adjectives or certain verbs which will be shown below:

The word *kuliko* can be used as a comparative of superiority/inferiority and carries the meaning of “. . . than” where the blank spot would be filled by another adjective, for example when using the adjective *hodari* with *kuliko* you get *hodari kuliko* which means “cleverer than” as shown below:

Mtoto wangu ni hodari kuliko mtoto wako. – My child is cleverer than your child.

Note however that *kuliko* can also be used not only as a comparative of superiority/inferiority but as a locative to indicate a place where something exists, for example:

Hapa ni mahali kuliko na watu wengi sana. – This is the place where there are many people.

The word *bora* meaning “better” or “best” must be combined with *kuliko*:

Afya ni bora kuliko mali. – Health is better than wealth.

The words *afadhali* and *heri* must be used at the start of the sentence and are translated as “better” or “it is better” and must have *kuliko* in the sentence to form a comparative of superiority:

Heri kununua nyumba kuliko kununua gari. – Better to buy a house than to buy a car.

Afadhali kuchelewa kuliko kukosa. – Better late than to miss (it).

The adjective *zaidi* can be combined with the *-a* of Association to form *zaidi ya* which is a comparative of superiority meaning “more than.” The verb *zidi*, meaning “increased” and/or “more than,” which is the root word of *zaidi* can be used instead of *zaidi ya*.

Mfuko wangu ni mpana zaidi ya mfuko wake. – My bag is wider than his/her bag.

Bei ya chakula imezidi mfumko. – The price of food has increased more than inflation.

The verbs *shinda* and *pita* can be used in a comparative sense. The literal translation of *shinda* is “pass, defeat” and the translation of *pita* is “pass, exceed.” When these verbs are used in a comparative sense they take the meaning of “better than” and are comparatives of superiority.

Timu ya mpira ya Hispania imeshinda timu ya Uholanzi.

Literally: The Spanish soccer team has beaten the Dutch team.

Therefore: The Spanish soccer team is better than the Dutch team.

Unafhamu Kirusi kupita Kiingereza.

Literally: Your understanding of Russian exceeds English.

Therefore: You (sing.) understand Russian better than English.

The adjective *duni* can be combined with the *-a* of Association to form *duni ya* which is a comparative of inferiority meaning “less than.” The verb *pungua* meaning “become less” can also be used as a comparative of inferiority.

Masanduku ya hati yana uzani duni ya sanduku la betri. – The boxes of documents weigh less than the box of batteries.

Chakula kimepungua utamu. – The food has become less tasty.

Comparative statements can also be formed by naming two nouns and making a statement that compares the two nouns. The comparison can be either a comparison of equality or a comparison of superiority/inferiority, for example:

Mohammad na Henry, Henry ni mwembamba. – Mohammad and Henry, Henry is thinner.

In some cases the two nouns being compared can be replaced by the appropriate demonstratives, for example:

Huyu na yule, yule ni mwembamba. – This (person) and that (person), that is thinner.

Practice Exercise B

Translate the following sentences into English.

6. *Yeye ni mwoga kuliko mtu wa kawaida.*
7. *Damu ni nzito kuliko maji.*
8. *Fedha na dhahabu, dhahabu ni ghali zaidi.*
9. *Sanaa umbuji hii ni muhimu kuliko sanaa ya nchi ile.*
10. *Dunia ni moto duni ya Zuhura.*

Section C: Superlatives

As stated in the introduction, superlatives have the same use in Swahili as in English, to show that something has the maximum degree of a quality compared to anything else in that context. In Swahili superlatives are formed by using one of the words, *-ote* or *-o -ote*, also sometimes *kuliko* can be used, for example:

My dad is better than all dads. (My dad is the best). – *Baba yangu ni bora kuliko baba wote.*

In Swahili superlative adjectives can be made in several ways and using many different words. The most common words will be shown below.

The adjective *zaidi ya* or the verb *zidi* can be used to form a superlative.

Mfuko wangu ni mpana zaidi ya mifuko yote. – My bag is wider than all bags.

Mfuko wangu ni mpana zaidi ya mfuko wo wote. – My bag is wider than any bag.

Bei ya chakula imezidi bei zote. – The price of food has increased more than all prices.

Bei ya chakula imezidi bei yo yote. – The price of food has increased more than any price.

The adjective *duni ya* or the verb *pungua* can be used to form a superlative.

Masanduku ya hati yana uzani duni ya masanduku yote. – The boxes of documents weigh less than all boxes.

Masanduku ya hati yana uzani duni ya sanduku lo lote. – The boxes of documents weigh less than any box.

Chakula kimepungua utamu kuliko vyakula vyote. – The food has become less tasty than all foods.

Chakula kimepungua utamu kuliko chakula cho chote. – The food has become less tasty than any food.

The verbs *shinda* and *pita* can be used to form a superlative.

Timu ya mpira ya Hispania imeshinda timu zote. – The Spanish soccer team has beaten all teams.

Timu ya mpira ya Hispania inaweza kushinda timu yo yote. – The Spanish soccer team is able to beat any team.

Unafahamu Kirusi kupita lugha nyingine zote. – Your understanding of Russian exceeds all other languages.

Unafahamu Kirusi kupita lugha nyingine yo yote. – Your understanding of Russian exceeds any other language.

A statement can be used to form a superlative.

Henry ni mwembamba kuliko watu wote. – Henry is thinner than all people.

Henry ni mwembamba kuliko mtu ye yote. – Henry is thinner than any person.

Practice Exercise C

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

11. The cobra is a more dangerous snake than any snake.
12. Francis's handwriting is neater than the handwriting of all the students.
13. My car insurance is the largest of all my bills.
14. The environment of Canada is better than the environment of any country.
15. The flowers from Tanzania are more beautiful than all flowers.

New Vocabulary

- a kawaida*: usual, average, normal
- afadhali*: better, it is better
- afya*: health
- bei*: price(s)
- betri*: battery(ies)
- bili*: bill(s)
- bima*: insurance
- chelewa*: be late
- damu*: blood
- dhahabu*: gold
- duni ya*: less than
- fanana*: resemble
- hati*: document(s), certificate(s)
- heri*: better, it is better
- Hispania*: Spain
- jana*: yesterday
- kama*: as, if, like, “as . . . as,” about
- kiasi/vi-*: amount(s), measure(s)
- Kirusi*: Russian, Russian language
- kosa*: miss, fail
- kuliko*: more, . . . than, where something exists
- kutoka*: from
- lingana*: match, harmonize
- lugha*: language(s)
- mali*: wealth, property(ies), possession(s)
- mazingira*: environment(s)
- mfumko*: inflation
- miwani*: eyeglasses
- mpenzi/wa-*: dear(s), loved one(s), girlfriend(s)
- muhimu*: important, urgent
- mwanajeshi/wa-*: soldier(s)
- mwandiko/mi-*: handwriting(s)
- mwoga/waoga*: swimmer(s), coward(s)
- nadhifu*: clean, neat, tidy
- nguvu*: strength, power, force
- nyesha*: rain
- pacha/ma-*: twin(s)

-pana: wide, flat
pita: pass, exceed
pua: nose(s), nozzle(s)
pungua: reduce, become less
sanaa: art(s), craft(s)
sanaa umbuji: fine art(s)
sawa na: equal to, similar
sawasawa: same, O.K.
shinda: pass, defeat, win
shujaa: brave
sifa: quality(ies), praise(s), characteristic(s)
sura: face(s), appearance(s)
swila: cobra(s)
televisheni: television(s)
timu: team(s)
Uholanzi: The Netherlands, Holland
unyoya/manyoya: feather(s)
utamu: sweetness, tastiness
uzani: weight
vilevile: also, equally
weza: able
zaidi: more
zaidi ya: more than
zidi: increase, more than
Zuhura: Venus
zulia/ma-: carpet(s), rug(s)

Key to Exercises

Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. *Kihindi ni lugha ngumu kama Kiingereza.*
2. *Pua yake inafanana na pua yangu.*
3. *Sisi tunaandika kitabu cha Kiswahili vilevile.*
4. *Yeye ni mwepesi kama unyoya.*
5. *Ilinyesha kwa nguvu sawasawa kama jana.*

Answers to Practice Exercise B

6. He/She is more afraid than the average person.
7. Blood is heavier than water. (Swahili proverb meaning Blood is thicker than water)
8. Silver and gold, gold is more expensive.
9. This fine art is more important than that country's art.
10. The Earth is less hot than Venus.

Answers to Practice Exercise C

11. *Swila ni nyoka hatari zaidi kuliko nyoka ye yote.*
12. *Mwandiko wa Francis ni nadhifu kuliko miandiko ya wanafunzi wote.*
13. *Bima ya gari langu ni kubwa kuliko bili zangu zote.*
14. *Mazingira ya nchi ya Kanada ni bora kuliko mazingira ya nchi yo yote.*
15. *Maua kutoka Tanzania ni mazuri zaidi kuliko maua yote.*

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