

Chapter 11

Object Infixes

In this chapter we will learn how Noun Class agreement applies when the noun from that class is the object of the sentence. The Object Infix can be used to replace or to reinforce the noun that is the object of the sentence. There are no exact rules of when Object Infixes should be used. Generally, the Object Infix is used when one wants to emphasize the object of the sentence or when a demonstrative or a possessive is present. It is also more commonly used when referring to living things as the object of the sentence. Object Infixes, no matter which class they are from, are always placed between the tense marker and the verb and can be used with any tense marker either positive or negative. As you can see in Table 11.1, there is no Negative Object Infix.

As you can see from Table 11.1, the PA- and KU- Class keep the same Subject Prefixes when changing from singular to plural. Also note that several noun classes use the same Object Infix.

Section A: M-/WA- Class Object Infixes

When discussing Object Infixes in the M-/WA- class, it should be noted that the 1st person singular (*ni-*), the 1st person plural (*tu-*) and 3rd person plural (*wa-*) use their Personal Subject Prefix as their Object Infix (See Chapter 3 for Personal Subject Prefixes). 2nd person singular and plural and 3rd person singular have Object Infixes that are not the same as their Personal Subject Prefixes. As mentioned above, Object Infixes are always placed between the tense marker and the verb as shown by the formula:

Agreement Subject Prefix + Tense Marker + Object Infix + Verb

TABLE 11.1
Object Infix Chart

Noun Class		Object Infix	English Translation
Singular	M - 1 st person singular	-ni-	me
	2 nd person singular	-ku-	you (sing.)
	3 rd person singular	-m(w)-	him/her
Plural	WA - 1 st person plural	-tu-	us
	2 nd person plural	-wa-	you (pl.)
	3 rd person plural	-wa-	them
Singular	M-	-u-	it
Plural	MI-	-i-	them
Singular	JI-	-li-	it
Plural	MA-	-ya-	them
Singular	KI-	-ki-	it
Plural	VI-	-vi-	them
Singular	N-	-i-	it
Plural	N-	-zi-	them
Singular	U-	-u-	it
Plural	U-	-zi-	them
	PA-	-pa-	it/them
	KU-	-ku-	it/them
	M-	-m(w)-	it/them
	KU-	-ku-	it/them

Therefore the sentence “He will see me” would be *A + ta + ni + ona*. = *Ataniona*.

There are a few rules which apply when using Object Infixes for the M-/WA- class. Notice that the Object Infix for the 3rd person singular (him/her) has the letter *w* in brackets in Table 11.1. This is because when a verb beginning with a vowel is used the Object Infix becomes - *mw*- as shown in the example below.

I will see him/her. – *Nitamwona*.

Of course, if the verb in the Swahili sentence does not start with a vowel then the Object Infix for the 3rd person singular (him/her) is simply -*m*- as shown in the following example.

I will answer him/her. – *Nitamjibu.*

The Object Infix for 2nd person singular which is *-ku-* should not be confused with either the infinitive *-ku-* used with verbs or with the negative tense marker *-ku-* which is used to negate the simple past tense marker *-li-*. For example:

I loved you. – *Nilikupenda.*

If the sentence was made negative it would become:

I did not love you. – *Sikukupenda.*

The first *-ku-* in the above negative sentence is the negative tense marker *-ku-* which is used to negate the simple past tense marker *-li-*, while the second *-ku-* is the Object Infix for 2nd person singular.

Note that there are rules used to ensure there is no confusion between the Object Infixes for the 2nd person plural “you (pl.)” and 3rd person plural “them” which are both translated in Swahili as *-wa-*. The sentence *Niliwaona* could mean either “I saw you (pl.)” or “I saw them”

To avoid confusion, the Object Infix *-wa-* is generally taken to refer to the 3rd person plural “them.” When someone wishes to refer to the 2nd person plural “you (pl.)” there are three possible ways to indicate this. The most common way is to take the sentence *Niliwaona* which could mean either “I saw you (pl.)” or “I saw them” and change the sentence to the following:

Niliwaoneni. – I saw you (pl.).

As you can see the Subject Prefix, Tense marker and Object Infix are all left the same. The difference is with the verb, in this case *ona*, which has had the final vowel *a* changed to *e* and the suffix *-ni* attached. All Bantu verbs will have their final vowel *a* changed to *e*. If the verb is of Arabic origin, its final vowel will remain unchanged. The suffix *-ni* must be added to all Bantu and Arabic verbs.

The second way of making the sentence is by the use of the Personal Pronoun *ninyi*.

Niliwaona ninyi. – I saw you (pl.).

The final way of making the sentence is by the use of the Object Infix *-ku-* for the 2nd person singular, but then indicating that the sentence refers to plural by the inclusion of the suffix *-ni*. This last construction is the least common in Swahili.

Nilikuoneni. – I saw you (pl.).

Lastly, it is important to note that even though some nouns referring to humans, animals and insects may exist in other noun classes, they still take the Object Infixes with the M-/WA- Class.

Mgonjwa alimshukuru daktari. – The patient thanked the doctor.

Mgonjwa aliwashukuru madaktari. – The patient thanked the doctors.

Nilimshauri kijana. – I advised the youth.

Niliwashauri vijana. – I advised the youths.

Practice Exercise A

Translate into Swahili.

1. They are helping us.
2. They chased the chickens.
3. He met her.
4. We will not help you (sing.).
5. I visited the prophet.
6. I have answered you (pl.).
7. She likes him.
8. The cat will chase the rats.
9. They forgave the children.
10. I did not ask you (sing.).
11. We do not know them.
12. Our government helps the blind people.
13. You (pl.) pushed me.
14. She killed the mosquito.
15. You (sing.) bought the cats.

Section B: The Other Noun Classes

Object Infixes for all the other noun classes are exactly the same as their Agreement Subject Prefixes. Below are a few examples:

- Tuliula mkate.* – We ate the (loaf of) bread.
Tuliila mikate. – We ate the (loaves of) bread.
Hatukuula mkate. – We did not eat the (loaf of) bread.
Hatukuila mikate. – We did not eat the (loaves of) bread.
Uliifungua sanduku. – You (sing.) opened the box.
Uliyafungua masanduku. – You (sing.) opened the boxes.
Hukulifungua sanduku. – You (sing.) did not open the box.
Hukuyafungua masanduku. – You (sing.) did not open the boxes.
Nimekivunja kiti. – I have broken the chair.
Nimevivunja viti. – I have broken the chairs.
Sikukivunja kiti. – I have not broken the chair.
Sikuvivunja viti. – I have not broken the chairs.
Atainunua baiskeli. – He will buy the bicycle.
Atazinunua baiskeli. – He will buy the bicycles.
Hatainunua baiskeli. – He will not buy the bicycle.
Hatazinunua baiskeli. – He will not buy the bicycles.
Wanaulima uwanja. – They are cultivating the field.
Wanazilima nyanja. – They are cultivating the fields.
Hawaulimi uwanja. – They are not cultivating the field.
Hawazilimi nyanja. – They are not cultivating the fields.
Tulipatembelea mahali. – We visited the place (definite).
Tulipatembelea mahali. – We visited the places (definite).
Hatukupatembelea mahali. – We did not visit the place (definite).
Hatukupatembelea mahali. – We did not visit the places (definite).
Tulikutembelea mahali. – We visited the place (indefinite).
Tulikutembelea mahali. – We visited the places (indefinite).
Hatukukutembelea mahali. – We did not visit the place (indefinite).
Hatukukutembelea mahali. – We did not visit the places (indefinite).
Tulimtembelea mahali. – We visited the place (inside).
Tulimtembelea mahali. – We visited the places (inside).
Hatukumtembelea mahali. – We did not visit the place (inside).
Hatukumtembelea mahali. – We did not visit the places (inside).
Tutakupenda kusoma. – We will like the reading.
Tutakupenda kusoma. – We will like the readings.
Hatutakupenda kusoma. – We will not like the reading.
Hatutakupenda kusoma. – We will not like the readings.

Note that when referring to the PA- Class (inside), the Object Infix has the letter *w* in brackets in Table 11.1. This is because when a verb

beginning with a vowel is used the Object Infix becomes *-mw-*. Also, when the Object Infixes for the PA- Class are present, it is optional to use the noun *mahali*.

Lastly, if the inanimate noun(s) being referred to is/are unknown, the Object Infix from the N- Class is used. For example:

Niliinunua. – I bought it.

Nilizinunua. – I bought them.

Practice Exercise B

Translate into Swahili.

16. The pen has stained the shirt.
17. The insects damaged the crops.
18. He will weed the garden.
19. I have read the book.
20. The fire burned the place (definite).
21. He is building the stone wall.
22. The water will fill the hole.
23. I have agreed with the writing.
24. The saw will cut the tree.
25. I cooked it.

Section C: More information on Object Infixes

Some sentences have two objects. When this occurs, one of the objects in the sentence has to be represented by a proper noun, because a Swahili verb phrase can only take one object infix. If one of the objects is a living thing, the living thing is represented by an object infix while the non-living thing is referred to by its proper noun. Also, often object infixes are used with prepositional verb typology which will be taught in Chapter 26.

Nitamsimulia hadithi. – I will tell him/her the story.

When two objects that are non-living are in a sentence, then the noun that is the direct object provides the object infix.

Nilikiona kitabu mfukoni. – I saw the book in the bag.

When a Monosyllabic verb is used with an Object Infix, then the infinitive *ku-* is dropped from the verb phrase. This rule applies no matter which tense marker is being used.

Niliyanywa maji. – I drank the water.

While it was stated that there are no exact rules of when Object Infixes should be used, there are three verbs in Swahili that must always take an Object Infix. Furthermore the Object Infix taken for these three verbs must always be from the M-/WA- Class.¹ These three verbs are listed below:

ambia – tell

ita – call

pa – give

Alimwambia kila kitu. – He/She told him/her everything.

Tumewaita jirani. – We have called the neighbours.

Nilikupa mkate. – I gave you the bread.

Practice Exercise C

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

26. She gave me the pen.
27. The students gave the doorman the broom.
28. The shopkeeper has called the police.
29. I heard the stone smashing the window.
30. The beggar told me that he needed money.

New Vocabulary

ambia: tell

bawabu/ma-: doorman/doormen

bustani: garden(s), park(s)

chafua: make dirty

choma: roast, burn

fungua: open, unlock

hadithi: story(ies)

haribu: destroy, spoil, damage

ita: call
jaza: fill
jibu: answer
jirani/ma-: neighbour(s)
kila kitu: everything
kimbiza: chase
kuta: meet
kuwa: that
mbu: mosquito(es)
msumeno/mi-: saw(s)
mwenye duka/wenye duka: shopkeeper(s)
mwombaji/wa-: beggar(s)
ona: see, feel
palilia: weed, hoe
panya: mouse(s), rat(s)
saidia: help
samehe: forgive, pardon
sanduku/ma-: box(es), suitcase(s)
serikali: government(s)
shati/ma-: shirt(s)
shauri: advise
shukuru: thank
sikia: listen, hear, feel
simulia: narrate, tell a story
sukuma: push
tembelea: visit
tundu/ma-: hole(s), nest(s)
ua: kill
ufagio/fagio: brush(es), broom(s)
uwanja/nyanja: field(s), open area(s)

Key to Exercises

Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. *Wanatusaidia.*
2. *Waliwakimbiza kuku.*
3. *Alimkuta.*
4. *Hatutakusaidia.*

5. *Nilimtembelea nabii.*
6. *Nimewajibuni* or *Nimewajibu ninyi* or *Nimekujibuni.*
7. *Anampenda.*
8. *Paka atawakimbiza panya.*
9. *Waliwasamehe watoto.*
10. *Sikukuuliza.*
11. *Hatuwajui.*
12. *Serikali yetu inawasaidia vipofu.*
13. *Mlinisukuma.*
14. *Alimwua mbu.*
15. *Uliwanunua paka.*

Answers to Practice Exercise B

16. *Kalamu imelichafua shati.*
17. *Wadudu waliyaharibu mazao.*
18. *Ataipalilia bustani.*
19. *Nimekisoma kitabu.*
20. *Moto ulipachoma.*
21. *Anaujenga ukuta wa mawe.*
22. *Maji yatalijaza tundu.*
23. *Nimekukubali kuandika.*
24. *Msumeno utaukata mti.*
25. *Niliipika.*

Answers to Practice Exercise C

26. *Alinipa kalamu.*
27. *Wanafunzi walimpa bawabu ufagio.*
28. *Mwenye duka amewaita polisi.*
29. *Nililisikia jiwe linavunja dirisha.*
30. *Mwombaji aliniambia kuwa alihitaji fedha.*

Note

1. Peter M. Wilson, *Simplified Swahili*, New ed. (Harlow, UK: Longman Group UK Limited, 1985), 110.

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