

# Chapter 19

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## More About Swahili Numbers

In this Chapter we will find such concepts as ordinal numbers, weights and measures, fractions, decimals, percentages, temperature and currencies in Swahili.

### Section A: Ordinal Numbers

Unlike cardinal numbers, which are used for counting, (as learned in Chapter 18) ordinal numbers are used for placing things in sequential order. All ordinal numbers except for first (*-a kwanza*) and second (*-a pili*) are derived directly from cardinal numbers as shown in the lists below.

#### Cardinal Number

*moja* – one

*mbili* – two

*tatu* – three

*nne* – four

*tano* – five

*sita* – six

*saba* – seven

*nane* – eight

*tisa* – nine

*kumi* – ten

## Ordinal Number

- a *kwanza* – first
- a *pili* – second
- a *tatu* – third
- a *nne* – fourth
- a *tano* – fifth
- a *sita* – sixth
- a *saba* – seventh
- a *nane* – eighth
- a *tisa* – ninth
- a *kumi* – tenth

Note that the *-a* of Association must be used in the singular form to construct an ordinal number.

Here are some phrases containing ordinal numbers.

- mwanafunzi wa kwanzathe* – first student
- kitabu cha pili* – the second book
- duka la tatu* – the third shop
- nyumba ya ishirini na moja* – the twenty-first house
- kisu cha ishirini na mbili* – the twenty-second knife
- mti wa thelathini na saba* – the thirty-seventh tree
- gari la mia mbili na mbili* – the two hundred and second car

As you can see from the above examples, all numbers above ten follow the same pattern where the *-a* of Association is used with a cardinal number. Also note that higher numbers using the numbers one and two do NOT use *kwanza* or *pili*. They are instead constructed using the cardinal numbers *moja* or *mbili* as shown in the examples above.

Finally, the word *-a mwisho* is used in ordinal numbers to indicate the last position. Here are examples of phrases containing *-a mwisho*:

- mwanafunzi wa mwisho* – the last student
- kitabu cha mwisho* – the last book

It should also be noted that an ordinal number is a quantitative adjective hence it should come after descriptive adjectives in a Swahili phrase. For example:

*paka mjanja wa tano* – the fifth cunning cat

*kibiriti ghali cha tatu* – the third expensive match box

Unlike cardinal numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8, which take agreement with the noun as learned in Chapter 18, ordinal numbers do not need to take agreement since the *-a* of Association takes agreement with the noun.

## Practice Exercise A

Translate these sentences into Swahili.

1. The eighth bicycle.
2. The seventeenth coconut.
3. The sixth guard.
4. The first cheap shirt.
5. The last lion.
6. The second big police officer.
7. The one hundred and first airplane.
8. The fourth dangerous river.
9. The fiftieth President.
10. The tenth telephone.

## Section B: Weights and Measures

The Metric System, known as *Mfumo wa Metriki*, is the standard weights and measures system used in the East African Community of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Consequently, the Metric System is more well known there than the U.S. Customary System.

### Metric Weights

*gramu* – gram

*kilo* – kilogram

*tani* – tonne

### U.S. Weights

*aunsi* – ounce

*ratili* or *ratli* – pound

*tani* – ton

The Swahili word *tani* applies to both a metric “tonne” and a U.S. “ton” which are not the same units of measurement.

### **Metric Distance Measurements**

*milimita* – millimetre  
*sentimita* – centimetre  
*mita* – metre  
*kilomita* – kilometre

### **U.S. Distance Measurements**

*inchi* – inch  
*futi* – foot  
*yadi* – yard  
*maili* – mile

### **Metric Area Measurements**

*hekta* – hectare

### **U.S. Area Measurements**

*eka* or *ekari* – acre

Distance measurements can be converted into area measurements by using the words *-a mraba*, which means “squared.” For example:

*kilomita moja ya mraba* – one square kilometre  
*yadi sabini na tatu za mraba* – seventy-three square yards

### **Metric Volume Measurements**

*mililita* – millilitre  
*lita* – litre

### **U.S. Volume Measurements**

*painti* – pint  
*galoni* – gallon

Distance and volume measurements can be converted into cubic measurements by using the words *-a mchemraba*, which means “cubic.” Once converted into a cubic measurement, it can only be used to refer to volume. For example:

*sentimita thelathini za mchemraba* – thirty cubic centimetres  
*inchi elfu moja za mchemraba* – one thousand cubic inches  
*lita kumi za mchemraba za maziwa* – ten cubic litres of milk

## Practice Exercise B

Translate these sentences into Swahili.

11. The government owns ten thousand square kilometres of land near here.
12. The girl is selling two litre jugs of milk.
13. I need sixteen metres of blue cloth.
14. This luggage weighs nineteen kilograms.
15. That firefighter bought ten acres of land.
16. The bottle contains (has) six hundred and fifty millilitres of orange juice.
17. The bag is able to hold one thousand eight hundred cubic centimetres.
18. His apartment is eleven hundred square feet.
19. That weighs only two grams.
20. The country of Tanzania is four thousand seven hundred miles from Britain.

## Section C: Fractions

When the fraction is made up of a half, a third, or a quarter, it is expressed using specific words in Swahili, derived from Arabic, which are shown below:

*nusu* – one half ( $\frac{1}{2}$ )  
*theluthi* – one third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ )  
*robo* – one quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ )

Further fractions can be made from *theluthi* and *robo* as shown below.

*theluthi mbili* – two thirds ( $\frac{2}{3}$ )

*robo tatu* – three quarters ( $\frac{3}{4}$ )

When a fraction does not contain a half, a third, or a quarter the word *sehemu* is used. *Sehemu* means a “part” out of a larger whole, for example:

*sehemu moja ya saba* – one “part” of seven ( $\frac{1}{7}$ )

*sehemu tisa za kumi na sita* – nine “parts” of sixteen ( $\frac{9}{16}$ )

*sehemu kumi na tatu za kumi na nane* – thirteen “parts” of eighteen ( $\frac{13}{18}$ )

Since the *-a* of Association takes agreement with the noun, which is *sehemu* in this case, you will note that the *-a* of Association is *ya* when dealing with one “part” and is *za* when dealing with more than one “part” as is the case with all nouns from the N- class.

Fractions are added to a whole number using the *na* (and) construction.

*kumi na nne na nusu* – fourteen and a half ( $14 \frac{1}{2}$ )

*ishirini na theluthi mbili* – twenty and two thirds ( $20 \frac{2}{3}$ )

*tisini na tisa na sehemu tisa za kumi* – ninety-nine and nine tenths ( $99 \frac{9}{10}$ )

As mentioned in Chapter 12, there is a specific word order to be followed in a Swahili sentence as shown below:

Noun, personal possessive, adjective,  
quantity, demonstrative and possessive.

In the list above the position in a sentence devoted to quantity can be filled either by a whole number, a fraction or both.

## Practice Exercise C

Translate these sentences into English.

21. *Nusu yangu ya tufaha ni tamu.*

22. *Mimi ninataka robo ratili ya sukari.*

23. *Themanini na nane na sehemu moja ya nane.*
24. *Sehemu mbili za ishirini na moja.*
25. *Gari langu lina theluthi mbili za tangi la petroli.*

Translate these sentences into Swahili.

26. My quarter of the business.
27. Forty-one and a quarter inches.
28. Do you have half a bag of flour?
29. Fifty and one sixth.
30. Two thirds of a cup.

## Section D: Decimals

The word for “decimal” or “point” is *nukta*, however the word *pointi* from the English word “point” is widely used these days. In Swahili, numbers after the word *pointi* or *nukta* are read out individually as in English.<sup>1</sup> For example:

*ishirini na saba pointi tatu, moja, nne, tano* – 27.3145  
*sifuri nukta saba, sita, moja, moja, tatu* – 0.76113

### Practice Exercise D

Translate into Swahili.

31. 2.456
32. 1002.77
33. 0.952

Translate into English

34. *Mia nane na themanini nukta tisa.*
35. *Tatu pointi moja, nne, saba, tisa, tano.*
36. *Sifuri nukta moja moja sifuri sita.*

## Section E: Percentages

*Asilimia* is the most common and direct way to express percentages in Swahili. *Asilimia* is made up of two words, *asili* which means “origin” and *mia* which means “hundred.” When the words are combined it means “originating from a hundred” or in other words “percent.” For example:

*Asilimia sitini na nane* – 68 percent

*Asilimia elfu moja* – 1000 percent

Note that the word order in the above examples is the reverse of how percentages are expressed in English.

The other way to express percentages in Swahili is to use the phrase “*kwa mia*.” Unlike when using the word *asilimia*, the phrase “*kwa mia*” comes after the numeral. For example:

*sabini kwa mia* – 70 percent

*moja kwa mia* – 1 percent

*mia moja na moja kwa mia* – 101 percent

## Practice Exercise E

Translate into Swahili using *asilimia*.

37. My mother paid 50 percent of my school fees.

38. 321 percent.

39. My share of the profit is 88 percent.

Translate into Swahili using *kwa mia*.

40. His bank pays 11 percent interest.

41. The company’s expenses are 72 percent of its revenues.

42. 1000 percent

## Section F: Temperature

Temperature in Swahili (*halijoto*) can be expressed, as in English, either by Celsius (*Selsiasi*) or in Fahrenheit (*Farenihaiti*). For example:

*Digrii ishirini na mbili za Selsiasi* – Twenty-two degrees Celsius

*Digrii tisini na tano za Farenihaiti* – Ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit

## Practice Exercise F

Translate into Swahili.

43. Thirty-three degrees Celsius

44. Sixty-four degrees Fahrenheit

45. One hundred degrees Celsius



## Section G: Currencies

The three countries of the East African community, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have named their currencies after the British Shilling. Each currency is different and has its own value. The word for “shilling” in Swahili is *shilingi* so the currencies are named as follows:

*Shilingi ya Kenya* – Kenyan Shilling  
*Shilingi ya Tanzania* – Tanzanian Shilling  
*Shilingi ya Uganda* – Ugandan Shilling

Other important currencies would be:

*Dola moja ya Marekani* – One American dollar  
*Pauni moja ya Uingereza* – One British Pound  
*Randi moja ya Afrika Kusini* – One South African Rand  
*Rupia moja ya Uhindi* – One Indian Rupee  
*Yuro moja ya Ulaya* – One Euro

### Practice Exercise G

Translate into English.

46. *Je umepoteza Yuro za Ulaya ishirini?*
47. *Tutabadilisha pesa zetu kwa Rupia za Uhindi.*
48. *Pauni ya Uingereza ina thamani zaidi kuliko Dola ya Marekani.*
49. *Walitumia Randi zao za Afrika Kusini kununua viatu.*
50. *Hoteli hii haipokei Yuro za Ulaya.*

### New Vocabulary

*-a kwanza*: first  
*-a mwisho*: last  
*-a pili*: second  
*asili*: origin  
*asilimia*: percent, originating out of a hundred  
*aunsi*: ounce(s) (U.S. unit of weight)  
*badilisha*: exchange, change  
*benki/ma-*: bank(s)  
*biashara*: business(es), commerce

*buluu*: blue  
*digrii*: degree(s)  
*Dola*: Dollar(s)  
*eka/ekari*: acre(s) (U.S. unit of measurement)  
*faida*: profit(s)  
*Farenihaiti*: Fahrenheit  
*fleti*: apartment(s), flat(s)  
*futi*: foot (feet) (U.S. unit of measurement)  
*galoni*: gallon(s) (U.S. unit of volume)  
*gharama*: expense(s)  
*gramu*: gram(s) (Metric unit of weight)  
*halijoto*: temperature(s)  
*hekta*: hectare(s) (Metric unit of measurement)  
*hisa*: stock(s), share(s)  
*jagi/ma-*: jug(s)  
*karo*: fee(s)  
*kilo*: kilogram(s) (Metric unit of weight)  
*kilomita*: kilometre(s) (Metric unit of measurement)  
*kwa mia*: from/out of a hundred  
*lipa*: pay  
*lita*: litre(s) (Metric unit of volume)  
*maili*: mile(s) (U.S. unit of measurement)  
*maji ya machungwa*: orange juice  
*mchemraba/mi-*: cube(s)  
*Mfumo wa Metriki*: Metric System  
*miliki*: own  
*mililita*: millilitre(s) (Metric unit of volume)  
*milimita*: millimetre(s) (Metric unit of measurement)  
*mita*: metre(s) (Metric unit of measurement)  
*mjanja*: cunning, sly  
*mlinzi/wa-*: guard(s)  
*mraba/mi-*: square(s)  
*mzimamoto/wa-*: firefighter(s)  
*nazi*: coconut(s)  
*nukta*: point(s), decimal(s), dot(s), period(s)  
*nusu*: half(ves) (as a fraction)  
*painti*: pint(s) (U.S. unit of volume)  
*pato/ma-*: revenue(s)  
*Pauni*: Pound(s) (British currency)

- pointi*: point(s), decimal(s)  
*pokea*: accept, receive  
*poteza*: lose, waste  
*Randi*: South African Rand  
*ratili/ratli*: pound(s) (U.S. unit of weight)  
*riba*: interest (financial)  
*robo*: quarter(s)(as a fraction)  
*Rupia*: Indian Rupee  
*Selsiasi*: Celsius  
*sentimita*: centimetre(s) (Metric unit of measurement)  
*shika*: catch, hold  
*Shilingi*: Shilling(s) (name of currencies used by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda)  
*sukari*: sugar  
*tangi/ma-*: tank(s), reservoir(s)  
*tani*: tonne(s) (Metric unit of weight) also a “ton(s)” as U.S. unit of weight  
*theluthi*: third(s) (as a fraction)  
*tu*: only  
*unga*: flour  
*uzito*: weight(s)  
*yadi*: yard(s) (U.S. of measurement)  
*Yuro*: Euro currency

## Key to Exercises

### Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. *Baisikeli ya nane.*
2. *Nazi ya kumi na saba.*
3. *Mlinzi wa sita.*
4. *Shati rahisi la kwanza.*
5. *Simba wa mwisho.*
6. *Polisi mkubwa wa pili.*
7. *Ndege ya mia moja na moja.*
8. *Mto wa hatari wa nne.*
9. *Rais wa hamsini.*
10. *Simu ya kumi.*

## Answers to Practice Exercise B

11. *Serikali inamiliki kilomita elfu kumi za mraba za ardhi karibu na hapa.*
12. *Msichana anauza majagi ya lita mbili za maziwa.*
13. *Ninahitaji nguo ya buluu ya mita kumi na sita.*
14. *Mzigo huu una uzito wa kilo kumi na tisa.*
15. *Mzimamoto yule alinunua eka kumi za ardhi.*
16. *Chupa ina mililita mia sita na hamsini za maji ya machungwa.*
17. *Mfuko unaweza kushika sentimita elfu moja mia nane za mchemraba.*
18. *Fleti yake ni futi elfu moja mia moja za mraba.*
19. *Ile ina uzito wa gramu mbili tu.*
20. *Nchi ya Tanzania ni maili elfu nne mia saba kutoka Uingereza.*

## Answers to Practice Exercise C

21. My half of the apple is tasty.
22. I want a quarter pound of sugar.
23. Eighty-eight and one eighth.
24. Two/twenty-firsts.
25. My car has two thirds of a tank of gas.
26. *Robo yangu ya biashara.*
27. *Inchi arobaini na moja na robo.*
28. *Je una nusu ya mfuko wa unga?*
29. *Hamsini na sehemu moja ya sita.*
30. *Theluthi mbili za kikombe.*

## Answers to Practice Exercise D

31. *Mbili nukta (or pointi) nne, tano, sita.*
32. *Elfu moja na mbili nukta (or pointi) saba, saba.*
33. *Sifuri nukta (or pointi) tisa, tano, mbili.*
34. 880.9
35. 3.14795
36. 0.1106

### Answers to Practice Exercise E

37. *Mama yangu alilipa asilimia hamsini ya karo yangu ya shule.*
38. *Asilimia mia tatu ishirini na moja.*
39. *Hisa ya faida yangu ni asilimia themanini na nane.*
40. *Benki yake inalipa riba ya kumi na moja kwa mia.*
41. *Gharama za kampuni ni sabini na mbili kwa mia ya mapato yake.*
42. *Elfu moja kwa mia.*

### Answers to Practice Exercise F

43. *Digrii thelathini na tatu za Selsiasi.*
44. *Digrii sitini na nne za Farenihaiti.*
45. *Digrii mia moja za Selsiasi.*

### Answers to Practice Exercise G

46. Have you lost twenty Euros?
47. We will exchange our money for Indian Rupees.
48. The British Pound is worth more than the American Dollar.
49. They used their South African Rand to buy shoes.
50. This hotel does not accept Euros.

## Note

1. Wilson, 103.

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