

Chapter 3

Personal Subject Prefixes, Personal Pronouns, and Their Negations

As you may recall, a simple Swahili sentence is constructed by using the STV rule discussed in Chapter 2. The STV rule is shown below:

Subject + Tense + Verb

In this chapter we will look at the first “spot” in a simple Swahili sentence, where the subject is located. In Swahili, the subject is denoted by a prefix which is then attached to a tense marker followed by a verb. When the subject being referred to is a human being, animal or an insect, the “spot” is taken by a Personal Subject Prefix. In this chapter, we will focus on Personal Subject Prefixes while Subject Prefixes dealing with things that are not humans, animals or insects will be covered in future Chapters.

Section A: Personal Subject Prefixes

Table 3.1 identifies who is the subject in a Swahili sentence i.e. who is “doing” the verb.

TABLE 3.1
Personal Subject Prefixes Table

<i>Ni-</i> I	<i>Tu-</i> We
<i>U-</i> You (singular)	<i>M-</i> You (plural)
<i>A-</i> He/She	<i>Wa-</i> They

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Using Table 3.1, we can make the following simple sentences:

NI-na-soma = *Ninasoma*. – I am studying.

TU-na-soma = *Tunasoma*. – WE are studying.

U-na-soma = *Unasoma*. – YOU (singular) are studying.

M-na-soma = *Mnasoma*. – YOU (plural, literally YOU ALL) are studying.

A-na-soma = *Anasoma*. – HE/SHE is studying.

WA-na-soma = *Wanasoma*. – THEY are studying.

Note that *A-* stands for EITHER “he” or “she.” If it is unclear whom the speaker is referring to, they may name the person, or add additional words to describe the person, “the man in the white shirt” or words such as “that woman.” The best way to think of *A-* is as “the person.” *Anasoma* then becomes “THE PERSON is studying” without assigning them any specific gender.

Also note that in Swahili there are two “types” of the word “you.” There is a “you” addressed to one person, as in English, which is represented by the Personal Subject Prefix *U-* and there is a “you” for more than one person, which is represented by the Personal Subject Prefix *M-* which would most closely be translated in English as “you all.”

Practice Exercise A

Let’s do some practice using the Personal Subject Prefixes we have just learned. Fill in the blank spot with the correct Personal Subject Prefix from Table 3.1 that corresponds with the English word in capital letters inside the brackets.

1. _____-*najua*. (WE know.)
2. _____-*najua*. (THE PERSON knows.)
3. _____-*najua*. (THEY know.)
4. _____-*najua*. (I know.)
5. _____-*najua*. (YOU [pl. = plural] know.)
6. _____-*najua*. (YOU [sing. = singular] know.)
7. _____-*nasema*. (THE PERSON is speaking.)
8. _____-*nasema*. (I am speaking.)
9. _____-*nasema*. (WE are speaking)
10. _____-*nasema*. (YOU [sing.] are speaking.)

11. _____-nasema. (YOU [pl.] are speaking.)
12. _____-nasema. (THEY are speaking.)

Section B: Negation of Personal Subject Prefixes

So far, we have made some simple Swahili sentences in their affirmative form. Now we will look at making negative Personal Subject Prefixes. In other words, changing “*Ninasoma.*” “I am studying.” into “I am NOT studying.”

TABLE 3.2
Negation of Personal Subject Prefixes Table

<i>Si-</i> I (am not)	<i>Hatu-</i> We (are not)
<i>Hu-</i> You [singular] (are not)	<i>Ham-</i> You [plural] (are not)
<i>Ha-</i> He/She (is not)	<i>Hawa-</i> They (are not)

In other words, *NI-* becomes *SI-*
TU- becomes *HATU-*
U- becomes *HU-*
M- becomes *HAM-*
A- becomes *HA-*
WA- becomes *HAWA-*

As you can see, most Personal Subject Prefixes are made negative by placing *H-* or *HA-* in front of them. The only exception is *NI-*, which instead becomes *SI-*.

Practice Exercise B

As in Practice Exercise A, please insert into the blank space the NEGATIVE Personal Subject Prefix that corresponds with the English word(s) in capital letters inside the brackets.

13. _____-*juu*. (WE do NOT know.)
14. _____-*juu*. (THE PERSON does NOT know.)
15. _____-*juu*. (THEY do NOT know.)

16. _____-*ju*. (I do NOT know.)
17. _____-*ju*. (YOU [pl.] do NOT know.)
18. _____-*ju*. (YOU [sing.] do NOT know.)
19. _____-*semi*. (THE PERSON is NOT speaking.)
20. _____-*semi*. (I am NOT speaking.)
21. _____-*semi*. (WE are NOT speaking.)
22. _____-*semi*. (YOU [sing.] are NOT speaking.)
23. _____-*semi*. (YOU [pl.] are NOT speaking.)
24. _____-*semi*. (THEY are NOT speaking.)

The disappearance of the tense marker (-*na*-) and the changing of the verb -*jua* to -*ju* and -*sema* to -*semi* will be explained in future Chapters. The most important concept to remember right now is the 6 Personal Subject Prefixes and how to make them negative.

Section C: Personal Pronouns and Their Negation

In addition to the Personal Subject Prefixes, Swahili also has 6 SEPERATE words that act as Personal Pronouns. These can be added to the sentence to reinforce and emphasise who is the subject of the sentence, the person “doing” the verb. For example, *Mimi* belongs with *ni*- from *ninasoma* which becomes *Mimi ninasoma* meaning literally, “I, I am studying.” While this sort of construction would be unnecessary in English, it is perfectly acceptable in Swahili. Table 3.3 illustrates the 6 possible Personal Pronouns.

TABLE 3.3
Personal Pronouns Table

<i>Mimi</i> = I [goes with <i>Ni</i> -]	<i>Sisi</i> = We [goes with <i>Tu</i> -]
<i>Wewe</i> = You (singular) [goes with <i>U</i> -]	<i>Ninyi</i> = You (plural) [goes with <i>M</i> -]
<i>Yeye</i> = He/She [goes with <i>A</i> -]	<i>Wao</i> = They [goes with <i>Wa</i> -]

So, our previous sentences would now become:

Mimi ninasoma. – I, I am studying.

Sisi tunasoma. – WE, we are studying.

Wewe unasoma. – YOU, you are studying.

Ninyi mnasoma. – YOU (pl.), you (pl.) are studying.

Yeye anasoma. – THE PERSON, the person is studying.

Wao wanasoma. – THEY, they are studying.

These Personal Pronouns (*Mimi*, *Sisi* etc.) do NOT have to be used. *Ninasoma* is still a complete sentence and makes perfect sense to a Swahili speaker. However they are often used at the beginning of a sentence because it “sounds better” to Swahili ears, or for extra emphasis.

Practice Exercise C

Insert into the blank space the Personal Pronoun that corresponds with the English word in capital letters inside the brackets.

25. _____ *unajua.* (YOU[sing.], you[sing.] know.)
26. _____ *ninajua.* (I, I know.)
27. _____ *wanajua.* (THEY, they know.)
28. _____ *anajua.* (HE/SHE [THE PERSON], he/she knows.)
29. _____ *tunajua.* (WE, we know.)
30. _____ *mnajua.* (YOU [pl.], you [pl.] know.)
31. _____ *ninapika.* (I, I am cooking.)
32. _____ *wanapika.* (THEY, they are cooking.)
33. _____ *unapika.* (YOU [sing.], you[sing.] are cooking.)
34. _____ *anapika.* (THE PERSON, the person is cooking.)
35. _____ *mnapika.* (YOU [pl.], you [pl.] are cooking.)
36. _____ *tunapika.* (WE, we are cooking.)
37. _____ *wanauliza.* (THEY, they are asking.)
38. _____ *unauliza.* (YOU[sing.], you[sing.] are asking.)
39. _____ *ninauliza.* (I, I am asking.)
40. _____ *tinauliza.* (WE, we are asking.)
41. _____ *mnauliza.* (YOU [pl.], you [pl.] are asking.)
42. _____ *anauliza.* (HE/SHE, he/she is asking.)

Negative Sentences with Personal Pronouns

Whether a sentence is affirmative or negative, no changes are made to the Personal Pronouns. They can be added to the sentence to reinforce and emphasise who is the subject of the sentence, for example:

Mimi ninasoma. – I, I am studying.

The negation of which is simply:

Mimi sisomi. – I, I am not studying.

New Vocabulary

a-: “He/She” Personal Subject Prefix

ha-: “He/She” negative Personal Subject Prefix

ham-: “You (pl.)” negative Personal Subject Prefix

hatu-: “We” negative Personal Subject Prefix

hawa-: “They” negative Personal Subject Prefix

hu-: “You” negative Personal Subject Prefix

jua: the verb “know”

jui: the negative of the verb “know” in the present tense

m-: “You (pl.)” Personal Subject Prefix

mimi: “I” personal pronoun

-na-: an infix, present tense marker, placing the verb in the present

ni-: “I” Personal Subject Prefix

ninyi: “You all” personal pronoun

pika: the verb “cook”

sema: the verb “speak” or “say”

semi: the negative of the verb “speak” or “say” in the present tense

si-: “I” negative Personal Subject Prefix

sisi: “We” personal pronoun

soma: the verb “study” or “read”

somi: the negative of the verb “study” or “read” in the present tense

tu-: “We” Personal Subject Prefix

u-: “You” Personal Subject Prefix

uliza: the verb “ask”

wa-: “They” Personal Subject Prefix

wao: “They” personal pronoun

wewe: “You” personal pronoun

yeye: “He/She” (The person) personal pronoun

Key to Exercises

Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. *TUnajua*. (WE know.)
2. *Anajua*. (THE PERSON knows.)
3. *WAnajua*. (THEY know.)
4. *NInajua*. (I know.)
5. *Mnajua*. (YOU [pl.] know.)
6. *Unajua*. (YOU [sing.] know.)
7. *Anasema*. (THE PERSON is speaking.)
8. *NInasema*. (I am speaking.)
9. *TUnasema*. (WE are speaking.)
10. *Unasema*. (YOU [sing.] are speaking.)
11. *Mnasema*. (YOU [pl.] are speaking.)
12. *WAnasema*. (THEY are speaking.)

Answers to Practice Exercise B

13. *HATUjui*. (WE do NOT know.)
14. *HAjui*. (THE PERSON does NOT know.)
15. *HAWAjui*. (THEY do NOT know.)
16. *SIjui*. (I do NOT know.)
17. *HAMjui*. (YOU [pl.] do NOT know.)
18. *HUjui*. (YOU [sing.] do NOT know.)
19. *HAsemi*. (THE PERSON is NOT speaking.)
20. *SIsemi*. (I am NOT speaking.)
21. *HATUsemi*. (WE are NOT speaking.)
22. *HUsemi*. (YOU [sing.] are NOT speaking.)
23. *HAMsemi*. (YOU [pl.] are NOT speaking.)
24. *HAWAsemi*. (THEY are NOT speaking.)

Answers to Practice Exercise C

25. *Wewe unajua*. (YOU [sing.], you [sing.] know.)
26. *Mimi ninajua*. (I, I know.)
27. *Wao wanajua*. (THEY, they know.)

28. *Yeye anajua.* (HE/SHE [THE PERSON], he/she knows.)
29. *Sisi tunajua.* (WE, we know.)
30. *Ninyi mnajua.* (YOU [pl.], you [pl.] know.)
31. *Mimi ninapika.* (I, I am cooking.)
32. *Wao wanapika.* (THEY, they are cooking.)
33. *Wewe unapika.* (YOU [sing.], you [sing.] are cooking.)
34. *Yeye anapika.* (THE PERSON, the person is cooking.)
35. *Ninyi mnapika.* (YOU [pl.], you [pl.] are cooking.)
36. *Sisi tunapika.* (WE, we are cooking.)
37. *Wao wanauliza.* (THEY, they are asking.)
38. *Wewe unauliza.* (YOU [sing.], you [sing.] are asking.)
39. *Mimi ninauliza.* (I, I am asking.)
40. *Sisi tunauliza.* (WE, we are asking.)
41. *Ninyi mnauliza.* (YOU [pl.], you [pl.] are asking.)
42. *Yeye anauliza.* (HE/SHE, he/she is asking.)