

# Chapter 8

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## Swahili Noun Classes: JI-/MA- Class and KI-/VI- Class

This chapter will focus on two more noun classes in the Swahili noun class system namely the JI-/MA- class and KI-/VI- class. We will begin with the JI-/MA- class.

### Section A: The JI-/MA- Class

There are some categories of nouns, which generally fall under the JI/MA- noun class. This includes names of fruits, some parts of plants, some parts of the body, one's status or occupation. It also includes non-countable nouns, some abstract nouns, collectives and a special category of nouns called the augmentatives.

This class is often referred to as the JI-/MA- class since some nouns in this class have the prefix JI- in the singular form, which may either change to MA- in the plural form or have MA- added to it. You may also come across some nouns, which contain JI- in the singular form but contain an irregular plural prefix. Other nouns in this class have no prefix in the singular form but contain MA- in the plural form. Below are the main categories that exist in the JI-/MA- class.

1. These nouns contain the prefix JI- in the singular form, which changes to MA- in the plural form:

*jicho* – eye

*macho* – eyes

*jiwe* – stone

*mawe* – stones  
*jifya* – earth  
*mafya* – hearths

## Exception nouns

There are some nouns that fall into this category that contain the prefix JA- in the singular form which change to MA- in the plural form:

*jambo* – matter  
*mambo* – matters

2. These nouns contain the prefix JI- in the singular form to which MA- is added in the plural form:

*jibu* – answer  
*majibu* – answers  
*jina* – name  
*majina* – names  
*jimbo* – province  
*majimbo* – provinces

3. These nouns contain JI- in the singular form but contain irregular plural prefix:

*jino* – tooth  
*meno* – teeth  
*jiko* – stove  
*meko* – stoves

4. These nouns have no prefix in the singular form but contain MA- in the plural form:

*gari* – car  
*magari* – cars  
*dirisha* – window  
*madirisha* – windows  
*daraja* – bridge  
*madaraja* – bridges  
*gazeti* – newspaper

*magazeti* – newspapers

*jani* – leaf

*majani* – leaves

*wazo* – thought

*mawazo* – thoughts

5. These nouns do not have a singular form. They only appear in the plural form and are denoted by the prefix MA

*maji* – water

*maziwa* – milk

*mafuta* – oil

*matata* – trouble

## Practice Exercise A

Change the following nouns from singular to plural where applicable.

1. *tunda*

2. *tawi*

3. *jua*

4. *ua*

5. *majivu*

6. *pera*

7. *figa*

8. *jini*

9. *jembe*

10. *mazungumzo*

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

11. They asked questions.

12. He/She got (encountered) problems.

13. The officers will come tomorrow.

14. We will buy pineapples.

15. I want an egg.

**Here are a few categories of nouns that generally fall under the JI-/MA- class:**

- Names of fruits, some parts of plants and some parts of the body which occur in pairs or a set:

*chungwa* – orange  
*machungwa* – oranges  
*nanasi* – pineapple  
*mananasi* – pineapples  
*jani* – leaf  
*majani* – leaves  
*gogo* – tree-trunk  
*magogo* – tree-trunks  
*sikio* – ear  
*masikio* – ears  
*jicho* – eye  
*macho* – eyes

- Nouns indicating one's status or occupation:

*bwana* – mister/sir  
*mabwana* – misters/sirs  
*rais* – president  
*marais* – presidents  
*dereva* – driver  
*madereva* – drivers  
*daktari* – doctor  
*madaktari* – doctors

- Non-countable nouns are shown below. These nouns only appear in the plural form:

*maji* – water  
*maziwa* – milk  
*mafuta* – oil

- Some abstract nouns are also included in this noun class. The singular and plural form of the noun may be the same or may be different:

*wazo* – thought  
*mawazo* – thoughts

*tatizo* – problem  
*matatizo* – problems  
*mazungumzo* – conversation  
*mazungumzo* – conversations  
*matata* – trouble  
*matata* – troubles

Note: This class can be used to collectivize or augment nouns. These concepts will be taught in Chapter 38.

Change the following occupation nouns from singular to plural.

16. *Waziri*
17. *Jambazi*
18. *Rubani*
19. *Nabii*
20. *Nesi*

## Section B: The *KI-/VI-* class

Most nouns in this class refer to household objects or languages. A few nouns in this class refer to parts of the body and some animals. This class is the easiest class in Swahili to use as far as singulars and plurals are concerned. Most nouns in this class have the prefix *KI-* in the singular form which changes to *VI-* in the plural form. A minority of nouns in this class have the prefix *CH-* in the singular form which changes to *VY-* in the plural form. However, not all nouns beginning with *CH-* belong to the *KI-/VI-* class.

1. These nouns contain the prefix *KI-* in the singular form which changes to *VI-* in the plural form:

*kiatu* – shoe  
*viatu* – shoes  
*kiazi* – potato  
*viazi* – potatoes  
*kidonge* – pill  
*vidonge* – pills  
*kijiko* – spoon  
*vijiko* – spoons

*kisu* – knife  
*visu* – knives  
*kitabu* – book  
*vitabu* – books

2. These nouns contain the prefix CH- in the singular form which changes to VY- in the plural form:

*chombo* – tool, utensil  
*vyombo* – tools, utensils  
*chumba* – room  
*vyumba* – rooms  
*chakula* – food  
*vyakula* – food  
*choo* – lavatory  
*vyoo* – lavatories

## Practice Exercise B

Change the following nouns from plural to singular where applicable.

21. *vituo*
22. *vyura*
23. *viungo*
24. *vyuma*
25. *viumbe*
26. *vyama*
27. *vyandarua*
28. *vinyozi*
29. *vitanda*
30. *vioo*

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

31. You will need matches.
32. The barbers are cutting hair.
33. We used a mosquito net over the bed.
34. He/She broke an ankle.
35. We arranged a meeting.

**Here are a few categories of nouns that belong to the *KI-/VI-* class:**

- Household objects, some parts of the body and some animals:

*kijiko* – spoon

*vijiko* – spoons

*kisu* – knife

*visu* – knives

*chakula* – food

*vyakula* – food

*kiuno* – waist

*viuno* – waists

*kiboko* – hippopotamus

*viboko* – hippopotami

*kifaru* – rhino

*vifarua* – rhinos

- Also, the names of languages belong to this class and they only exist in the singular form.

*Kiswahili* – Swahili

*Kiingereza* – English

*Kifaransa* – French

*Kireno* – Portuguese

*Kiarabu* – Arabic

- Nouns that show incapacity or subordinate status belong here:

*kiziwi* – deaf person

*viziwi* – deaf people

*kipofu* – blind person

*vipofu* – blind people

*kijana* – youth

*vijana* – youths

*kibarua* – labourer

*vibarua* – labourers

Note: This class can be used to make diminutive nouns. This concept will be taught in Chapter 38.

How would you say the following languages in Swahili?

36. Hindi
37. Spanish
38. Chinese
39. Maasai language
40. Persian/Farsi

## New Vocabulary

*chama/vy-*: political party(ies)  
*chandarua/vy-*: mosquito net(s), veil(s)  
*chombo/vy-*: vessel(s), tool(s), utensil(s)  
*choo/vy-*: lavatory(ies)  
*chuma/vy-*: steel, iron  
*chungwa/ma-*: orange(s)  
*chura/vy-*: frog(s)  
*daraja/ma-*: bridge(s)  
*dereva/ma-*: driver(s)  
*dirisha/ma-*: window(s)  
*figa/ma-*: hearth(s)  
*gazeti/ma-*: newspaper(s), magazine(s)  
*gogo/ma-*: tree trunk(s)  
*hitaji*: need  
*jambazi/ma-*: gangster(s)  
*jani/ma-*: leaf(ves)  
*jembe/ma-*: hoe(s)  
*jibu/ma-*: answer(s)  
*jicho/macho*: eye(s)  
*jifya/ma-*: hearth(s)  
*jiko/meko*: stove(s), kitchen(s)  
*jimbo/ma-*: province(s)  
*jina/ma-*: name(s)  
*jini/ma-*: spirit(s)  
*jino/meno*: tooth/teeth  
*jiwe/mawe*: stone(s)  
*jua/ma-*: sun(s)  
*juu ya*: over, above, about  
*kata*: cut  
*kesho*: tomorrow



*Kiajemi*: Persian/Farsi, Persian/Farsi language  
*Kiarabu*: Arabic, Arabic language  
*kiatu/vi-*: shoe(s)  
*kiazi/vi-*: potato(es)  
*kibarua/vi-*: labourer(s)  
*kibiriti/vi-*: match(es) – for lighting a fire  
*kiboko/vi-*: hippopotamus(mi)  
*Kichina*: Chinese, Chinese language  
*kidonge/vi-*: pill(s)  
*Kifaransa*: French, French language  
*kifaru/vi-*: rhino(s)  
*kifundo/vi-*: ankle(s)  
*Kihindi*: Hindi, Hindi language  
*Kihispania*: Spanish, Spanish language  
*Kiingereza*: English, English language  
*kijiko/vi-*: spoon(s)  
*kikao/vi-*: meeting(s)  
*Kimaasai*: Maasai, Maasai language  
*kinyozi/vi-*: barber(s)  
*kipofu/vi-*: blind person(s)  
*Kireno*: Portuguese, Portuguese language  
*kisu/vi-*: knife(ves)  
*Kiswahili*: Swahili, Swahili language  
*kitabu/vi-*: book(s)  
*kitanda/vi-*: bed(s)  
*kituo/vi-*: stop(s), station(s)  
*kiumbe/vi-*: organism(s)  
*kiungo/vi-*: body joint(s)  
*kiuno/vi-*: waist(s)  
*kiziwi/vi-*: deaf person(s)  
*mafuta*: fat, oil  
*maji*: water  
*majivu*: ashes  
*matata*: trouble  
*maziwa*: milk  
*mazungumzo*: conversation(s)  
*nabii/ma-*: prophet(s)  
*nanasi/ma-*: pineapple(s)  
*nesi/ma-*: nurse(s)

*ofisa/ma-*: officer(s), official(s)  
*panga*: rent, arrange  
*pata*: get, receive  
*pera/ma-*: guava(s)  
*rais/ma-*: president(s)  
*rubani/ma-*: pilot(s)  
*sikio/ma-*: ear(s)  
*swali/ma-*: question(s)  
*taka*: want  
*tatizo/ma-*: problem(s)  
*tawi/ma-*: branch(es)  
*tumia*: use, spend, exploit  
*tunda/ma-*: fruit(s)  
*ua/ma-*: flower(s)  
*unywele/nywele*: hair(s)  
*vunja*: break  
*waziri/ma-*: minister(s)  
*wazo/ma-*: thought(s)

## Key to Exercises

### Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. *atunda*
2. *matawi*
3. *majua*
4. *maua*
5. *majivu*
6. *mapera*
7. *mafiga*
8. *majini*
9. *majembe*
10. *mazungumzo*
11. *Waliuliza maswali.*
12. *Alipata matatizo.*
13. *Maofisa watakuja kesho.*
14. *Tutanunua mananasi.*
15. *Ninataka yai.*
16. *Mawaziri*

17. *Majambazi*
18. *Marubani*
19. *Manabii*
20. *Manesi*

## Answers to Practice Exercise B

21. *kituo*
22. *chura*
23. *kiungo*
24. *chuma*
25. *kiumbe*
26. *chama*
27. *chandarua*
28. *kinyozi*
29. *kitanda*
30. *kioo*
31. *Utahitaji vibiriti.*
32. *Vinyozi wanakata nywele.*
33. *Tulitumia chandarua juu ya kitanda.*
34. *Alivunja kifundo.*
35. *Tulipanga kikao.*
36. *Kihindi*
37. *Kihispania*
38. *Kichina*
39. *Kimaasai*
40. *Kiajemi*

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