

Chapter 21

Days, Months, and Dates in Swahili

This chapter will focus on how the Swahili people name the days of the week, months of the year and form dates in Swahili.

Section A: Days of the Week (*Siku za wiki*)

In Swahili culture the first day of the week is Saturday, which is translated as *Jumamosi*, literally meaning “first day of the week.” As you can see from the chart below, most days of the week follow the same pattern except Thursday and Friday, which are of Arabic origin. In Swahili, Thursday is translated as *Alhamisi*. The Arabic translation of *Alhamisi* is “The fifth” (day), however it is actually the sixth day of the Swahili week. It is followed by Friday (*Ijumaa*), which is the seventh day of the week. *Ijumaa* literally means “prayer day.”

English – Swahili – Abbreviation

Saturday – *Jumamosi* – J1.

Sunday – *Jumapili* – J2.

Monday – *Jumatatu* – J3.

Tuesday – *Jumanne* – J4.

Wednesday – *Jumatano* – J5.

Thursday – *Alhamisi* – A1.

Friday – *Ijumaa* – Ij.

In Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda the “weekend” (*wikiendi*) consists of Saturday and Sunday as in the Western world, although many Mus-

lims on the coasts of Kenya and Tanzania consider Friday as a day of rest and prayer also.

When using Swahili days of the week in a sentence, the day of the week is placed in the same way as in English, either directly before the subject or at the end of the sentence, for example:

Ijumaa Aziza atarudi London. – On Friday Aziza will return from London.

Aziza atarudi London Ijumaa. – Aziza will return from London on Friday.

As you can see from the sentences above the word *Ijumaa* does not take a preposition to become “on Friday.” However, days of the week can take demonstratives, and are N- class nouns. Therefore the examples above could be modified to the following:

Ijumaa hii Aziza atarudi London. – This Friday Aziza will return from London.

Aziza atarudi London Ijumaa hii. – Aziza will return from London this Friday.

Days of the week can also be referred to by using adverbs of time. Below is a list of examples:

zamani – long ago, in ancient times

juzijuzi – the other day

juzi – the day before yesterday

jana – yesterday

leo – today

kesho – tomorrow

kesho kutwa – the day after tomorrow

mtondo – three days from now

mtondogoo – four days from now

Examples:

Kesho atarudi kutoka London. – Tomorrow he/she will return from London.

Atarudi London kesho. – He/She will return to London tomorrow.

Atarudi kutoka London kesho. – He/She will return from London tomorrow.

As you can see from the above examples, adverbs of time also do not take prepositions.

Practice Exercise A

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

1. That Monday I went to the post office before closing time.
2. The other day a rhinoceros was seen near that old village.
3. Four days from now they will have an important meeting for all the managers.
4. On Sunday several rivers near the mountains overflowed their banks.
5. Long ago the Arabs built a fort with a mosque here.
6. These three Wednesdays will be quiet.
7. Yesterday we waited until after 11:15 a.m.
8. Tomorrow I will buy your airline ticket.
9. The lawyer will go to the town council on Tuesday.
10. These days you (pl.) are always busy.

Section B: Months

The names of the months in Swahili are taken directly from English. Here are the Swahili months of the year:

Januari – January
Februari – February
Machi – March
Aprili – April
Mei – May
Juni – June
Julai – July
Agosti – August
Septemba – September
Oktoba – October
Novemba – November
Desemba – December

As with all Swahili words, the pronunciation stress continues to fall on the second last syllable. When speaking about a particular month the names of the months can be used on their own or they can be preceded by the words *mwezi* meaning “month...” or *mwezi wa* meaning “month of...” For example:

Aprili niliogelea. – In April I went swimming.

Katika mwezi Aprili niliogelea. – In the month of April I went swimming.

Katika mwezi wa Aprili niliogelea. – In the month of April I went swimming.

Although it is perfectly acceptable to use the “names” of the months as they are, some Swahili people prefer the easier way of counting the months “first month, second month, etc.” as shown below:

Mwezi wa kwanza – January

Mwezi wa pili – February

Mwezi wa tatu – March

Mwezi wa nne – April

Mwezi wa tano – May

Mwezi wa sita – June

Mwezi wa saba – July

Mwezi wa nane – August

Mwezi wa tisa – September

Mwezi wa kumi – October

Mwezi wa kumi na moja – November

Mwezi wa kumi na mbili – December

For example:

Katika mwezi wa nne niliogelea. – In the fourth month (April) I went swimming.

As with the days of the week, when using months in a sentence the month is placed in the same way as in English, either directly before the subject or at the end of the sentence. So the preceding examples in this section could have been written as:

Niliogelea Aprili. – I went swimming in April.

Niliogelea katika mwezi Aprili. – I went swimming in the month of April.

Niliogelea katika mwezi wa Aprili. – I went swimming in the month of April.

Niliogelea katika mwezi wa nne. – I went swimming in the fourth month. (April)

When naming the months directly, the months are N- class nouns, however if the word *mwezi* is used before the name of the month then noun class agreement must be with *mwezi* which is in the M-/MI- noun class.

Practice Exercise B

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

11. After June, the government will close the airport for repairs.
12. The writer was on vacation for the whole month of September.
13. I am leaving this May to travel to Mozambique.
14. He/She advertised that job in December.
15. My child returned from Russia in October.

Section C: Dates in Swahili

When saying the date in Swahili, two different formats can be used. Either the word *tarehe*, which means “date” is said followed by a cardinal number or *tarehe ya ...* meaning “date of . . .” is used followed by an ordinal number. For example:

Tarehe moja or *Tarehe ya kwanza* – The First (of the month)

Tarehe mbili or *Tarehe ya pili* – The Second (of the month)

Therefore “the 5th of July” could be said as either:

Tarehe tano Julai. Or *Tarehe ya tano Julai.*

When saying the number “one” (*moja*) sometimes one will hear the word *mosi* used instead when saying the date. The word *mosi* is an old form of the word *moja*.

When saying the year in Swahili the words *mwaka*, which means “year” or *mwaka wa . . .* meaning “year of . . .” is used followed by a cardinal number.

The year 1981

Mwaka elfu moja, mia tisa, themanini na moja or
Mwaka wa elfu moja, mia tisa, themanini na moja

Finally, when saying the full date in Swahili the format day, month and then year is usually followed, although it is also possible to use the format month, day and then year. For example:

The 18th of October 2002.

Tarehe kumi na nane, mwezi wa Oktoba, mwaka wa elfu mbili na mbili.

Practice Exercise C

Translate the following sentences into Swahili.

16. The 24th of August 1972 is my best friend’s birthday.
17. Kenyan Independence Day is the 12th of December 1963.
18. The mayor retired July 31st 1999.
19. The trade talks will start January 1st 2014.
20. The Second World War ended on the 15th of August 1945.
21. Tanzanian Independence Day is December 9th 1961.
22. My child was born March 13th 2001.
23. He built that building on the 5th of May 1821.
24. The government will make a decision by September 17th 2026.
25. Ugandan Independence Day is October 9th 1962.

New Vocabulary

Agosti: August
Alhamisi: Thursday
Aprili: April
boma/ma-: fort(s), compound(s)
daima: always
Desemba: December
Februari: February
furika: overflow, flood
halmashauri ya/za mji/miji: town council(s)
Ijumaa: Friday
Januari: January
Julai: July
Jumamosi: Saturday
Jumanne: Tuesday
Jumapili: Sunday
Jumatano: Wednesday
Jumatatu: Monday
Juni: June
juzi: the day before yesterday
juzijuzi: the other day
kabla: before
kwa ajili: for, because
likizo: holiday(s), vacation(s)
Machi: March
matengenezo: repair(s)
Mei: May
meya: mayor(s)
mkutano/mi-: meeting(s)
msikiti/mi-: mosque(s)
Msumbiji: Mozambique
mtondo: three days from now
mtondogoo: four days from now
mwanasheria/wa-: lawyer(s)
Novemba: November
Oktoba: October
onekana: be seen, appear
posta: post, post office(s)

Septemba: September
shughuli: business(es), activity(ies)
siku ya/za kuzaliwa: birthday(s)
Siku ya Uhuru: Independence Day
staafu: retire
tangaza: advertise, announce
tarehe: date(s)
tiketi: ticket(s)
tulivu: quiet
uwanja/nyanja wa/za ndege: airport(s)
Vita vya Pili vya Dunia: The Second World War
wikiendi: weekend(s)
zaliwa: born

Key to Exercises

Answers to Practice Exercise A

1. *Jumatatu ile nilikwenda posta kabla ya wakati wa kufunga.*
2. *Juzijuzi kifarua alionekana karibu na kijiji kile cha zamani.*
3. *Mtondogoo watakuwa na mkutano muhimu kwa ajili ya mameneja wote.*
4. *Jumapili mito kadhaa karibu na milima ilifurika kingo zao.*
5. *Zamani Waarabu walijenga boma lenye msikiti hapa.*
6. *Jumatano tatu hizi zitakuwa tulivu.*
7. *Jana tulingoja mpaka baada ya saa tano na robo asubuhi.*
8. *Kesho nitanunua tiketi yako ya ndege.*
9. *Mwanasheria atakwenda halmashauri ya mji Jumanne.*
10. *Siku hizi daima mna shughuli.*

Answers to Practice Exercise B

11. *Baada ya Juni serikali itafunga uwanja wa ndege kwa ajili ya matengenezo.*
12. *Mwandishi alikuwa katika likizo kwa mwezi wote wa Septemba.*
13. *Ninaondoka mwezi huu wa tano kusafiri Msumbiji.*
14. *Alitangaza kazi ile Desemba.*
15. *Mtoto wangu alirudi kutoka Urusi mwezi wa kumi.*

Answers to Practice Exercise C

16. *Tarehe ishirini na nne, mwezi wa Agosti, mwaka wa elfu moja, mia tisa, sabini na mbili ni siku ya kuzaliwa ya rafiki yangu mpenzi.*
17. *Siku ya Uhuru wa Kenya ni tarehe ya kumi na mbili, mwezi Desemba, mwaka elfu moja, mia tisa, sitini na tatu.*
18. *Meya alistaafu tarehe thelathini na moja, mwezi wa saba, mwaka wa elfu moja, mia tisa, tisini na tisa.*
19. *Mazungumzo ya biashara yataanza tarehe ya kwanza, Januari, mwaka elfu mbili, kumi na nne.*
20. *Vita vya Pili vya Dunia ilimalizika tarehe ya kumi na tano, mwezi Agosti, mwaka wa elfu moja, mia tisa, arobaini na tano.*
21. *Siku ya Uhuru wa Tanzania ni tarehe ya tisa, mwezi wa Desemba, mwaka wa elfu moja, mia tisa, sitini na moja.*
22. *Mtoto wangu alizaliwa tarehe kumi na tatu, mwezi wa tatu, mwaka wa elfu mbili na moja.*
23. *Yeye alijenga jengo lile tarehe ya tano, Mei, mwaka wa elfu moja, mia nane, ishirini na moja.*
24. *Serikali itafanya uamuzi kabla ya tarehe kumi na saba, mwezi wa Septemba, mwaka elfu mbili, ishirini na sita.*
25. *Siku ya Uhuru wa Uganda ni tarehe tisa, mwezi wa kumi, mwaka elfu moja, mia tisa, sitini na mbili.*

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