

The Terms for “Emotion” in Swahili:

A Lexical Analysis Based on Interviews with Native Speakers

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In this paper, I will describe the linguistic encoding of the conceptual category “emotion” in Swahili, by focusing on an analysis of the lexicon. After giving a brief overview of recent studies on lexical semantics, I will discuss and problematise the conceptual category of “emotion.” I will first describe the Swahili verbs which describe the semantic domain of perception, e.g. *-sikia* (hear); *-ona* (see); *-hisi* (touch), and show that, in some contexts, their meaning is often metonymically extended to “feel.” I will then present analysis of definitions and contexts of use of the Swahili terms for “emotion” which were relevant during data collection. Data were collected both through Swahili monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and through interviews with and questionnaires administered to native Swahili speakers in Dar es Salaam. The study shows that Swahili uses different terms in order to describe the different facets of the complex category of “emotion.” Swahili uses a general term *hisia*, a loanword from Arabic, to indicate both physical and abstract feelings. However, there are other Swahili terms which indicate different semantic facets of the concept “emotion”: *mzuka* (spirit), which is culturally linked to spirit possession and healing practices; *mhemko* (excitement), which can have different meanings according to the context of use, e.g. anxiety, strong desire, anger or love; and *msisimko* (thrill), which suggests specific reference to a bodily reaction, e.g. to fear, cold or excitement.

1. Introduction

Studies conducted cross-linguistically by Wierzbicka (1988; 2001; 2004) have demonstrated that there are significant differences in the use of emotional lexicon, not only across languages, but also within a single language. According to Wierzbicka, emotions should be considered as “cultural” artefacts which cannot be elucidated in terms of English folk taxonomies (Wierzbicka 1988: 983).

Thus, the English label “emotion” will be used in this study as a semantic category to talk about the general concept of “emotion” and related terms such as “feelings, perception, sensation.” Indeed, if words such as “emotion” are taken for granted as analytical tools and if their English-based character is not kept in mind, they can reify inherently fluid phenomena which might be conceptualised and categorised in many different ways (Wierzbicka 1999: 3). In fact, while the very meaning of the English word *emotion* includes both a reference to feelings and a reference to thoughts (as well as a reference

to the body) (Wierzbicka 1999: 5), in some languages there is no word for “emotion” at all (Wierzbicka 1999: 3). For instance, the word used in German as the translation equivalent of the English *emotion*, *Gefühl* (from the verb *fühlen* “to feel”) makes no distinction between mental and physical feelings; the plural form *Gefühle* is restricted to thought-related feelings and – unlike the English *emotion* – doesn’t imply any “bodily disturbances” (Wierzbicka 1999: 3).

The analysis of different terms expressing the concept of “emotion,” e.g. *hisia* (feeling) *mzuka* (spirit) *mhemko* (excitement) etc., is fundamental in order to reveal the semantic fields or connotations which evoke different conceptualisations. Thus, studying emotional terminology is also a key to understanding the different conceptual categories in Swahili culture and how the language organises them according to the semantic grids which are at its disposal.

For instance, Goddard (1998) has pointed out that there are some differences between the English words *happy*, *joyful* and *pleased* which become evident when comparing differences in how these terms are used (Goddard 1998: 91-93). He acknowledges that in English *happy* conveys a less intense emotion than that conveyed by *glücklich* in German or *heureux* in French.

Similarly, we acknowledge that, even so-called “universal” emotional categories, such as “love,” have different semantic representations which can be elucidated through the lexicon. In ancient Greek, for instance, we can distinguish between different types of ‘love’ associated with different Greek terms: *éros* (ἔρως) ‘love, passion, desire’; *philia* (φιλία) ‘affection, attachment, friendship’ (among individuals, cities, communities); *agápē* (ἀγάπη) ‘love, affection, charity of God and for God’; *storgē* (στοργή) ‘the spontaneous love among siblings, persons who feel they belong to the same family or clan’; *xenía*, ‘friendly disposition towards foreigners, hospitality.’¹

Similarly again, when considering a semantic category like “anger,” the Russian verbs *seredit’sja* and *rassedit’sja* suggest a more active stance than the English ‘be angry’ (like ‘rejoice’ vs ‘be happy’ in English) according to Wierzbicka (1998). As opposed to the English ‘be angry,’ the Russian verb *seredit’sja* implies an external manifestation of the emotion: the speaker is not passively experiencing the feeling, but is “doing something” and expressing it in his behaviour (Wierzbicka 1998: 24). Furthermore, the Russian word *gnev*, which is usually glossed in English-Russian dictionaries as ‘anger,’ does not mean the same as ‘anger,’ since it implies a conflict with basic ethical principles that the word ‘anger’ does not convey (Wierzbicka 1998: 19).

¹ The definitions of the words in ancient Greek are taken from the Greek-Italian dictionary of ancient Greek (GI) by Montanari *et al.* (2003). See also Aime (2010: 385).

This shows that from a cross-cultural perspective we do not find exact equivalents in different languages because the concept of an emotion is interpreted through categories existent in our own language (Santangelo 2009). The concept of *amae* in Japanese, which indicates a particular type of affection (Goddard 1998), or the concept of *Schadenfreude* in German (Wierzbicka 1999) are oft-cited examples of emotions which have no English equivalents.

However, since it is evident that human beings share more or less similar experiences, which are often conceptualised as bodily phenomena, cognitive linguistic studies have emphasised the universality of so-called ‘basic emotion concepts,’ such as anger, fear, happiness, sadness, love, lust (sexual desire), pride, shame and surprise. Whereas many of these emotion concepts, like love or surprise, or the concept of “emotion” itself, could arguably be seen as cases of “basic” level categories, some correspondences between these universal categories and the “semantic primes” suggested by Wierzbicka have been identified (Kövecses, 1998). As Wierzbicka acknowledges, many writers have begun to agree that the “progress of research into ‘human emotions’ requires clarification of the concept of ‘emotion’ itself” (Wierzbicka 1999: 6).

Thus, in this paper, I will discuss the relationship between the general conceptual category of “emotion” and the lexicon used to describe it in order to illustrate its different semantic connotations, both through the definitions found in Swahili dictionaries and through speakers’ elucidations and descriptions.

This lexical semantic analysis shows that whether or not two feelings are interpreted as two different instances of “the same emotion” or as instances of “two different emotions” depends largely on the language through the cultural prism of which these feelings are interpreted (Wierzbicka 1999: 26).

2. Data collection and fieldwork

This study is based both on definitions and translations extracted from monolingual and bilingual Swahili dictionaries and on data gathered through questionnaires and interviews conducted with native Swahili speakers in Dar es Salaam during fieldwork in 2016.² Indeed, “dictionary definitions cannot always capture all current senses of a word and meta-linguistic intuition varies across speakers” (San Roque *et al.* 2018: 374).

² I am extremely grateful to the teachers and the students at “Salma Kikwete” secondary school in Dar es Salaam (Kijitonyama) and to the scholars at the University of Dar es Salaam who agreed to help me in this study.

The questionnaires were anonymous and submitted to a class of twenty-six students (male and female) at the “Salma Kikwete” secondary school, in the district of Kijitonyama, Dar es Salaam.³

Data were also collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with nine scholars at the University of Dar es Salaam: seven of these worked at the Institute of Swahili Studies (TATAKI) and two at the Department of Fine and Performing Arts.

The interviews with Swahili scholars were conducted exclusively in Swahili and based on general questions such as “Is there a word for / How would you say “emotion” in Swahili?”; “What does *hisia* (*mhemko* etc.) mean?”; “How/in which context would you use the term *hisia/mhemko*?”; “Can you say *hisia ya furaha/mapenzi/huzuni...?* (*hisia* of joy/love/sadness?).”

Twelve of the twenty-six students who answered the questionnaire mentioned the term *hisia* (feeling) as a first word for the concept “emotion;” six out of these twelve indicated the term *mzuka* (spirit) as a synonym of *hisia* (feeling); three students suggested the definition of *msisimko* (thrill). Other terms, such as *mhemko* (excitement), *hamasa* (motivation), *hamu* (desire), *stimu* (pressure) and *mawazo* (thoughts) were only mentioned once in the questionnaires. In particular, definitions and explanations of the terms *hisia* (feeling), *mzuka* (spirit) and *mhemko* (excitement), were clarified through direct elicitations during interviews with Swahili scholars at the Department of Swahili Studies of the University of Dar es Salaam (TATAKI).

In the following paragraphs, I will explain in detail the semantic description of the terms describing the conceptual category of “emotion” in Swahili by following definitions found in the dictionaries used and the explanations given by native speakers.

3. Swahili perception verbs

Before analysing the Swahili terms used to describe the conceptual category of “emotions,” we should recognise that the concept of “emotion” is highly culture-bound and cannot be used without analysing the universal human concept of “feeling.”

Indeed, the language of perception has received particular cross-linguistic attention since “it represents the intersection of our common physiological basis for experience on the one hand, and the

³ The entire questionnaire was composed of 12 open questions regarding the description of specific emotional situations. However, for the purpose of this paper, I have only considered data regarding the first question in the questionnaire, which was about the general definition of the concept of “emotion” in Swahili. I have not included the rest of the data as they were off-topic.

bountiful variety of human linguistic and cultural systems on the other” (e.g., Howes 1991; Classen 1997 in San Roque *et al.* 2018: 372).

We observe that Swahili has several verbal roots which refer to the domain of FEEL and “perception.” There are two Bantu verbal stems which describe “to feel:” *-sikia* (hear), used to express feeling through contact, e.g. *nasikia mwiba ndani ya kiatu changu* (I can feel a thorn in my shoe) and *-ona* (see) which indicates feeling without contact, e.g. *mwenyekiti aliona uzito wa hoja yake* (the chairman felt the force of his argument). These two verbs are also used with a reflexive prefix, that is, *-jisikia*, *-jiona* (lit. to feel yourself), when describing somebody’s physical state, such as illness, e.g. *najisikia mgonjwa* (I feel ill). Furthermore, the verb *-ona* is also adopted to indicate both physical and emotional states, e.g. *-ona baridi/ furaha* (to feel cold/ happy) (TUKI 2001), and in the senses of “think, consider, believe, assume,” e.g. *Yeye anaona kwamba mpango wetu si mzuri* (She thinks that our plan is not good) and “discover, find out,” e.g. *Tumeona kwamba wao si wakweli* (We have found out that they are not honest), thus with reference to the semantic field of knowledge. The same verb is used in the applicative form *-onea* with the meaning of “bully, oppress,” e.g. *Wakoloni waliwaonea sana wenyeji*, the colonialists oppressed the indigenous people (Mohamed 2011: 603); it is also used to express feelings for someone else, e.g. *-onea huruma* (feel pity); *-onea wivu* (feel envious), *Yeye anamwonea wivu rafiki yako kwa sababu ya mali yake*, he feels envious of your friend because of his wealth (TUKI 2001; Mohamed 2011: 869).

Another verbal stem, similar in meaning to *-ona*, is the Arabic loanword *-hisi* (feel), which commonly refers to sensorial experience and also extends to abstract feelings and emotions.⁴

As San Roque *et al.* acknowledge, we notice that “the basic perception verbs often have additional meanings that do not refer to literal sensory experience, and are often presented as metaphorical extensions from embodied physical experience to more abstract domains, although some examples may speak more to the idea of metonymic rather than strictly metaphorical extension” (San Roque *et al.* 2018: 372).

Thus, when we observe a linguistic association between perception and another semantic domain, we follow François’ (2008) definition of “colexification,” that is, “the capacity, for two senses, to be lexified by the same lexeme in synchrony.”

For example, “the senses ⟨hear⟩ and ⟨feel⟩ are colexified in several areas of the world: Catalan *sentir*, Italian *sentire*, Mwotlap *yoñteg* and Bislama *harem*. Given that Latin lexified *sentire* “feel” and *audire* “hear” distinctly, Catalan and Italian evidently illustrate a case of late semantic merger between the two words” (François 2008: 174).

⁴ For detailed explanations on the meaning of the verb *-hisi*, see the following paragraph on *hisia* (feelings).

This is also the case for Swahili perception verbs, which colexify sensorial experiences (-ona, -sikia, -hisi) with abstract emotions. As our Swahili interviewees indicated, the following expressions are in current use and some of the perception verbs can be used interchangeably:⁵

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 1. <i>Ni-na-hisi njaa/joto/baridi</i> | I feel hungry/hot/cold |
| 1s-PRES-feel hunger/hot/cold | |
| 2. <i>Ni-na-sikia njaa/joto/baridi</i> | “ “ |
| 1s-PRES-hear hunger/hot/cold | |
| 3. <i>Ni-na-sikia/nahisi maumivu</i> | I feel pain |
| 1s-PRES-hear/1s-PRES-feel pain | |
| 4. <i>Ni-na-sikia/ nahisi/ homa⁶</i> | I feel (I have) fever |
| 1s-PRES-hear/1s-PRES-feel fever | |

We could question why an Arabic root has been borrowed, in addition to the Bantu roots -ona and -sikia, to refer to the semantic field of perception in Swahili. Considering the context of use of -ona (see) and -sikia (hear), we can speak about “colexification” of two senses (respectively see-feel and hear-feel) since these verbs are widely used when referring to both physical and abstract domains. On the other hand, the lexical root -hisi has a more restricted meaning as a verb, where it is rarely associated with emotional states and expresses the idea of “feel” as associated with sensorial experience. The examples below show that, although sentences 5, 7, 10 and 12 (preceded by the asterisk) are not to be considered unacceptable in Swahili, the interviewees suggested alternative expressions (sentences 6, 8, 9, 11 and 13) which are believed to be more common (i.e. the examples which are not preceded by the asterisk):

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 5. <i>*Ni-na-hisi furaha</i> | I feel happiness |
| 1s-PRES-feel happiness | |
| 6. <i>Ni-na furaha</i> | <i>lit.</i> I am with happiness |
| 1s-with happiness | |

⁵ Interview with Dr. Edith Lyimo (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 21.01.2016). Interview with Leonard Bakize (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 4.2.2016).

⁶ Interview with Dr. Edith Lyimo (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 21.01.2016)

7. **Ni-na-hisi mapenzi* I feel love
1s-PRES-feel love
8. *Ni-na-hisi ku-m-penda fulani* lit. I feel I love someone
1s-PRES-feel INF-OBJ-love someone
9. *Ni-na hisia z-a mapenzi* I have feelings of love
1s-with feelings cl.10-CONN love
10. **Ni-na-hisi huzuni* I feel sadness
1s-PRES-feel sadness
11. *Ni-na huzuni* I am with sadness
1s-with sadness
12. *Ni-na-sikia huzuni* I feel sadness
1s-PRES-hear sadness
13. **Ni-na-hisi hasira* I feel anger
1s-PRES-feel anger
14. *Ni-na-sikia hasira* lit. I hear anger (I feel anger)
1s-PRES-hear anger

Nahisi wivu (I feel envy) is mostly used with a positive meaning (similar to admiration), instead of *naona wivu* or *nasikia wivu* (I feel envy), which have a negative connotation.⁷

According to Kharusi (1994: 156) “sometimes, and as a consequence of borrowing, the semantic field of the native word may be extended or restricted.” Thus, we could make the hypothesis that the lexical root *-hisi*, has been introduced into Swahili in order to intensify the meaning of Bantu perception verbs, so that, through an “ameliorative development” (Kharusi 1994: 185), the expression “*nahisi wivu*” (I feel envy) has acquired a positive connotation. Indeed, it has been attested that “some loanwords have also undergone partial or total pejorative or ameliorative developments,” that is, “these words may already have had a negative or positive connotation in Arabic, but this too, is sometimes increased or decreased in degree, when they are incorporated into Swahili” (Kharusi 1994: 185). Furthermore, the root *-hisi*, commonly used when making suppositions in Swahili with the meaning of “have the feeling,” has been borrowed as a loan-synonym of the Bantu verb root *-ona* to

⁷ Interview with Dr. Edith Lyimo (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 21.01.2016)

intensify its abstract meaning. In this case it relates to the sphere of knowledge in the sense of “having the perception of something” without being certain.⁸

The lexical root *-hisi* has been shown to have a wider semantic spectrum when it occurs as a noun (*hisia*), as we will observe in the following paragraph. Thus, the Arabic loanword *hisia* has probably been borrowed to satisfy a lexical need given that the corresponding Bantu perception verbs *-ona* and *-sikia* do not have deverbative forms used to refer to the concepts of “emotions” and “feelings.”

3.1. *Hisia* (feeling)

By looking at the dictionary definitions of terms referring to the domain of feelings/emotions, we see that Swahili has a general lexical root (*-hisi-*) to describe physical experience.

The verb *-hisi* is an Arabic loanword glossed in English as “feel, perceive, sense, envisage” (TUKI 2001). It also occurs in expressions specifically referring to a physical contact, e.g. *hisi mapigo ya moyo* (feeling the pulse). Definitions of the verb *hisi* in our monolingual dictionaries firstly relate its sense to the physical dimension, especially contact: 1. *tambua kwa njia ya ngozi* (recognise through the skin/through contact, touch); 2. *fikiria usahihi wa kitu kwa njia za milango ya fahamu k.v. kuona, kunusa, kugusa, kuonja au kusikia* (make sure of something through the senses, e.g. to see, to smell, to touch, to taste, to hear) (BAKITA 2015: 300).

In fact, Leonard⁹ says that there is a “biological” meaning to *-hisi*:

Kuhisi kibaiolojia ni kwa kutumia viungo vya mwili...kwa mfano ‘nahisi joto’ maana ngozi yako imehisi vitu...ninahisi njaa, unasikia kabisa unataka kula lakini huwezi kugusa, nahisi hapa kuna kitu kimekufa unatumia pua kusikia harufu fulani ingapo hujakuona, nahisi joto/baridi. Unaweza kutembea unasema nahisi nimekanyaga nyoka. Kuhisi ni mwili unahisi kwa kutumia milango ya fahamu (kuona, kusikia, kuonja, kutazama, kutumia ngozi), ni kama tunavuka mipaka...

To feel in a biological sense is through body organs...for instance, ‘I feel hot’ means that your skin feels something ... ‘I feel hungry’ means you feel that you want to eat, but you cannot touch, ‘I have the feeling here there is something dead,’ you use your nose to smell something even when you do not see it, ‘I feel hot/cold.’ You can walk and say ‘I have the feeling I have trampled on a snake. ‘To feel,’ it is the body that feels through the senses (to see, to hear, to taste, to watch or to use your skin), is like going beyond the boundaries...

⁸ For more explanations of this meaning, see the following paragraph.

⁹ Interview with Leonard Bakize (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 4.2.2016).

Mohamed (2011: 226) gives a similar translation of the verb *-hisi*, that is, “sense, feel, perceive” e.g. *-hisi njaa* (feel hunger); *-hisi baridi* (feel cold). Subsequently, he indicates as a second meaning of the entry: “think, recognise, feel,” e.g. *Anahisi kwamba hatua uliyoichukua ilikuwa sawa*: he thinks that the action you had taken was correct (Mohamed 2011: 226). Indeed, the verb *-hisi* is often used in everyday discourse to refer to unreality and imagination, e.g. *hisi/jihisi kama kwamba*, i.e. “feel as if/ though,” with a meaning similar to the verb *-jiona* lit. “see oneself” (reflexive form of the verb *-ona* “see”) *alijiona kama kwamba alikuwa anapaa*: he felt as if he were flying.

In fact, as Leonard¹⁰ observes, the verb *-hisi* is often used when making suppositions based on *dalili* (mark, trace):

Ninahisi fulani ni mwizi...lakini hana uhakika anakuwa anadalili tu. Au tabia nyingine, nafikiri nina hisia fulani, kuna kitu mwili unaniambia ninahisi kwamba fulani ana tatizo... Namna anavyojisikia... Nahisi kama mgonjwa ila huna uhakika...ni kama dalili. Nahisi ninaumwa... Ninahisi fulani anampenda fulani, hana uhakika

I have the feeling that someone is a thief.... -but s/he is not sure, s/he is just supposing. Or another situation- I have a feeling, my body is telling me something, I have a feeling that someone has a problem... I feel like if I am sick – but s/he is not sure...It is like a sign. I feel like I am not well...I have the feeling someone loves someone else – s/he is not sure

Leonard¹¹ also gives similar examples of this use of *-hisi*: “*Nahisi -kama sioni- kama mtu amepita nje...nahisi kama kuna jambo linaendelea*” (I have the feeling – although I am not looking- someone has passed by outside....I have the feeling something is going on).

The abstract meaning of *-hisi* often relates it to *moyo* (the heart), which metonymically refers to the sphere of knowledge, cognition: “*jua moyoni; tambua moyoni; waza; dhania*” (Knows in his/her heart; recognises with his/her heart; think; abstract) (TUKI 2004: 115).

Similarly, the definition of the derived noun *hisia* (feeling, sense, sensation), is connected to the five senses, e.g. *Binadamu ana hisia tano*: human beings have five senses; however, it also refers to abstract feelings, e.g. *hana hisia juu ya matakwa ya wananchi*, he has no feelings about the aspirations of the people (Mohamed 2011: 226). In some dictionaries *hisia* is reported as having a more specific connotation, that is a synonym of *mapenzi* “love, affection” (TUKI 2004: 115), e.g. *Hana hisia juu ya mumewe*, she has no love for her husband (Mohamed 2011: 226). In *Kamusi ya Visawe* (dictionary of

¹⁰ Interview with Leonard Bakize (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 4.2.2016).

¹¹ Interview with Dr. Edith Lyimo (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 21.1.2016).

synonym) too, *hisia* is glossed as a synonym of “*mguso, upendo, mchomo*” (touch, love, sharp pain), (Mohamed and Mohamed 2008: 73), that is associated with both physical pain and love.

Thus, it seems that the noun *hisia*, like the corresponding verb, can refer to physical states, e.g. *hisia ya njaa* (a feeling of hunger) and emotional states, e.g. *hisia ya furaha* (a feeling of joy), *hisia za udhalili* (inferiority complex) and *hisia za majikwezo* (superiority complex) (TUKI 2001).

Moreover, some definitions describe *hisia* as a feeling which starts from the senses and is constructed in the mind through meditation: “*picha ya kimawazo inayojengeka akilini kutokana na ama kuona, kugusa, kunusa, kuonja au kusikia kitu au jambo na hata kwa njia ya taamuli*” (mental picture which is built in the mind through seeing, touching, smelling, tasting or hearing something, or through contemplation) (BAKITA 2015: 300). In this sense, we can probably better understand the definition made by Leonard, that is, “[*hisia*] ...ni kama tunavuka mipaka...” ([*hisia*]...it is as if you exceed the boundaries...).¹²

Thus, both the definitions from the dictionaries and speakers’ elucidations show that *hisia* is a general label indicating feelings perceived through both bodily contact and mental experiences.

What is more, speakers’ conceptualisation of *hisia* bear witness to the connection between physical and psychological dimensions, perceived through the body which often manifests sensations and reactions.

Indeed, much like the observation made by Leonard, Mw. Njewe¹³ clearly distinguishes between “*hisia za ndani*” (inner feelings – emotions) and “*hisia za nje*” (external feelings), stating that *hisia* is something that starts as an inner feeling and can manifest itself externally through our bodily reactions. According to N, the external manifestations of our inner state are *hisia*:

Hisia za ndani, lazima uhisi ndani ndo ujionyeshe huko nje... Hasira, furaha, unahisi kwa ndani, kuna kitu unakionyesha kwa nje... zile ni hisia, unapokuwa na maumivu unauonyesha kwa nje. Pia ni mguso wa ndani siyo wa mwili wa wazi wa nje, unaweza itokee ndani kwa hiyo nje tunaona, inaanza ndani inatoka nje, kama umefurahi utacheka, utatabasamu.

Inner feelings, you necessarily feel them internally so that you show them externally. Anger, happiness, you feel them internally, there is something you show externally...these are feelings, when you feel pain you show it externally. Even when it is an inner touch/impact that is not visible on the external body, it can happen internally so that we see it externally. It starts internally and comes out externally, and, if you are happy, you will laugh, you will smile.

¹² Interview with Leonard Bakize (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 4.2.2016).

¹³ Interview with Delphine Njewe (Fine and Performing Arts Department, University of Dar es Salaam, 22.01.2016).

Dr. Shembilu¹⁴ also observes that the meaning of *hisia* is bodily related and is conceptualised as an inner feeling which touches the heart:

(Hisia) inaonyesha hali ambayo mtu anakuwa nayo kutokana na hali zake katika mwili, kutokana na mlango wa fahamu, ngozi...unapogusa kitu unahisi kitu fulani, unapata hisia. Unaweza kuwa na hisia za furaha, huzuni, uchungu, au hisia pia unapoguswa na kitu moyoni jambo la msiba, hisia za ule msiba, hisia za mapenzi.

Hisia shows the state of a person depending on his/her bodily condition, depending on the senses, the skin... when you touch something, you feel something, you get *hisia*. You can have *hisia* of happiness, sadness, resentment, or *hisia* when your heart is touched by something, something like grief, *hisia* of that grief, *hisia* of love.

Daines¹⁵ also describes *hisia* in terms of a physical reaction strictly connected to inner feelings:

Kama unamsimulia mtu kitu, yeye anapata ile hisia mpaka mwili unaonyesha, labda kitu ambacho kinafurahisha ama kuhuzunisha sana, unapata kabisa vile vimweleo ama mwili wako unaonekana kama unatoka ile hali ya ubaridi, ataonyesha ile hisia yake...wewe utamwona tu...facial expressions lakini pia mwili wake jinsi anavyoreact.

If you tell someone something, s/he gets a feeling that his/her body manifests, it may be something which provokes happiness or sadness, indeed you get goose bumps or your body seems to be cold... it will show its feelings...you will see it...from his/her facial expressions, but also from his/her body, from his/her way of reacting.

What is more, the students involved in the questionnaire described the concept of “emotion” in Swahili as *hisia kali* (a strong feeling) and *hamu* (desire), similar to *hamasa* (strong motivation), that is, a strong desire, wish to do something or, more generally, an intense feeling:¹⁶

- *Ni kile kitendo cha kumshawishi mtu katika kitu fulani ili aweze kukubaliana na kitu hicho (hamasa au hisia)*
(It is the act of persuading someone to do something so that s/he agrees with that thing),
(motivation or feeling)

¹⁴ Interview with Dr. Mussa Shembilu (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 02.02.2016).

¹⁵ Interview with Dr. Daines Sanga (Department of Fine and Performing Arts, University of Dar es Salaam, 19.01.2016).

¹⁶ Students also indicated the noun *mzuka* (spirit) as a synonym of *hisia*. For more explanations, see the following paragraph.

- *Kuwa na hisia au kuwa na hamu ya kufanya au kutenda jambo fulani mfano: ‘ninatamani kufanikiwa katika masomo yangu’* (To have *hisia*, or to have a desire to do or perform something for example: ‘I wish to succeed in my studies’)
- *Ni hisia kali ambazo si za kawaida mfano maumivu* (It is strong *hisia* which is unusual, for example pain)

Thus, we acknowledge that the term *hisia*, includes a reference to feelings, the body and thoughts. However, unlike for the word “emotion” in English, these three aspects, although strictly interrelated, do not necessarily coexist. Indeed, *hisia* is also used to refer to bodily feelings such as *hisia ya joto/baridi* (a feeling of hot/cold), and *-hisi joto/baridi* (to feel hot). This is similar to the English “feeling/to feel” whereas expressions like *“an emotion of hot/cold” would not be acceptable.

Indeed, according to Wierzbicka (1999: 2) ‘For example, one can talk about a “feeling of hunger,” or a “feeling of heartburn,” but not about an “emotion of hunger” or an “emotion of heartburn,” because the feelings in question are not thought-related. One can also talk about a “feeling of loneliness” or a “feeling of alienation,” but not an “emotion of loneliness” or an “emotion of alienation,” because, while these feelings are clearly related to thoughts (such as “I am all alone,” “I don’t belong,” etc.), they do not suggest any associated bodily reactions or processes (such as rising blood pressure, a rush of blood to the head, tears, and so on).’

In Swahili, the same label *hisia* refers to conditions which do not imply physical contact, but which are still conceptualised by the speakers as bodily related because they imply a bodily manifestation of the inner state e.g. *hisia ya furaha/-hisi furaha* (a feeling/sensation of joy/ feeling of happy); *hisia ya huzuni/-hisi huzuni* (a feeling of sadness/to feel sad).

Thus, it seems that, according to Swahili speakers’ conceptualisation, the verbal stem *-hisi* emphasises a connection with bodily feelings and sensations, and metonymically extends to indicate emotions, especially those states of minds which provoke bodily manifestations and reactions. On the other hand, the sensorial domain is connected with the sphere of knowledge, mediated by the senses, so that this verb is commonly used with the abstract sense of “having a feeling, thought,” used when making suppositions.

Moreover, the derived noun *hisia*, is also associated with both sensorial experience (*hisia ya njaa* “feeling of hunger”) and abstract feelings or emotions, and is conceptualised as an inner feeling which is often strictly interconnected with bodily manifestations, thus implying different facets of meaning (e.g. *hisia ya furaha* “feeling of joy”; *hisia ya huzuni* “feeling of sadness”; *hisia ya mapenzi* “feeling of love”).

3.2. *Mzuka* (spirit)

According to the data collected through the questionnaires given to Swahili students, apart from *hisia*, there are other Swahili words which refer to the conceptual category of “emotions.” In particular, six out of twenty-six students indicated *mzuka* as a synonym of *hisia*.

This is the definition of *mzuka* that one of the students gave:

“*Mzuka au hisia ni hali ambayo mtu au watu inayoweza kuwatokea katika kipindi fulani. Mfano: furaha*” (*Mzuka* or *hisia* is a condition which can develop within a person or people at a certain moment. For example: happiness).

The term *mzuka* is glossed in English as “goblin, apparition, ghost, evil spirit” (Mohamed 2011: 565) and is defined as:

Umbo la mtu anayeaminika kuwa amekufa ambalo linajitokeza kwa binadamu kama kiumbe yuleyule aliyehai (shetani); shetani anayepanda ndani ya mwili wa mwanadamu; mtu aliyetokea ghafla mahali bila kutarajiwa; hali ya mtu kupagawa na kufanya mambo yasiyo ya kawaida (BAKITA 2015: 771).

The shape of a person presumed dead which appears to human beings as a creature similar to someone who is alive (spirit); a spirit that comes into human body; a person who suddenly appears somewhere unexpectedly; the condition of a person who is possessed and behaves in an unusual way.

The term derives from the verb *-zuka*: “emerge, appear, come, surface” (Mohamed 2011: 886). In her description of the *vilinge* (sing. *kilinge* “confreries traditionnelles”), Racine (2019) classifies *mizuka* as « esprit non-possesseur » and states that “Le terme *mzuka* « apparition » est rarement cité. Construit sur la même base que le verbe *-zuka* « sortir de terre » qui est lui-même le dissociatif de *-zika* « enterrer ,” il est apparenté à *kizuka* qui désigne une veuve durant la période de réclusion (*uzuka*)» (Racine 2019: 342)

Thus, the etymology metonymically recalls the idea of an apparition, a temporary state of mind or something that happens unexpectedly.

The meaning of *mzuka* is semantically extended to the emotional domain, where it indicates the state of being overwhelmed by a sudden motivation, inspiration, desire or will to do something, for

instance: “*Nimepata mzuka, ngoja sasa hivi nipige vitabu! Nina mzuka wa kusoma*” (I have been overcome by the spirit, let me study hard now! I have the spirit/motivation to study).¹⁷

As Zawadi observed, *mzuka* (ghost, spirit) is also used in the context of dance (*ngoma*) or artistic performances in general, with the sense of “positive energy,” similar to *mdadi* (excitement):

*Nimepata midadi/mzuka bwana, katika muktadha wa kucheza muziki, nyimbo za pwani, mduara... 'nimepandisha midadi/mzuka' hata ukiongea mimi sisikii, akili inataka tu kucheza (katika ngoma)*¹⁸

I have been overcome by the spirit/excitement my friend, in the context of dance performances in a circle, songs of the coast... 'I made the excitement/spirit come up...' even if you talk, I don't hear, my mind only wants to dance [during dance performances].

Thus, *mzuka* occurs (often interchangeably with *mdadi* 'excitement') in expressions like *kupata mzuka/mdadi* (to get excited) or *kupandisha mzuka/mdadi* (to be filled with excitement/a ghost), indicating the state of being extremely excited and losing control.

Moreover, in the dictionary of *luga ya mtaani* “slang” (Reuster-Jahn and Kiessling 2006), *mzuka* is defined as a “sudden apparition, pop-up, spirit, ghost,” with several emotional connotations derived through metonymic extension, that is, 1. *wasiwasi* 2. *hamu* 3. *ari* (1. worry 2. desire 3. Moral) (Reuster-Jahn and Kiessling 2006: 160).

In Swahili slang, *mzuka* is used with the meaning of *wasiwasi* (worry), for example: *Oya mshikaji, tuliza mapepe, usiwe na mzuka!* In standard Swahili: *Rafiki, tuliza haraka, usiwe na wasiwasi!* (My friend, calm down now, don't worry) (Reuster-Jahn and Kiessling 2006: 160).

Similarly, *wasiwasi* is often used in the context of spirit possession. It is derived from the Arabic *waswās* which, according to Minerba (2017: 47) “expresses the idea of whispering, but also that of temptation, suggesting something evil, a wicked action.”¹⁹

According to Topan (1992: 55), patients mention a condition known in Swahili as *wasiwasi*, which describes a state of depression or a disturbed state of mind, similar to acute anxiety, reflecting the troubled self.²⁰

¹⁷ Interview with Zawadi Limbe (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 18.01.2016).

¹⁸ Interview with Zawadi Limbe (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 18.01.2016).

¹⁹ Minerba (2017:47) also points out that this term occurs in the Swahili drama *Mashetani* written by Hussein, (1971:34) where its meaning can be reconnected to the Arabic etymology of *waswasa*, that is the malefic word of the Devil, described in the Quran as a ‘retreating whisperer’ from whom a human being seeks refuge.

²⁰ Similar to *wasiwasi*, the term *mawazo* (idea, opinion, view), which only occurred once in the questionnaire, can also refer to “emotions” associated with the sphere of knowledge and mental experience, such as being in the state of thinking really hard.

Indeed, as Acquaviva (2018: 146) asserts “The principle of practice in traditional medicine is premised on the belief that a human being is both a somatic and spiritual entity and that disease can be due to supernatural causes as well as to the invasion of the body by external objects.”

In spoken Swahili, *mzuka* occurs in expressions like *amepandisha mzuka* (lit. s/he has made the ghost rise up), not only in the context of spirit possession, but also, more generally, with reference to a situation where someone is losing control, for instance in a description of anger or extreme excitement. This concept is not always associated with negative behaviour, but could also be explained as hyper-activity or positive energy, especially in the context of artistic performances, for example on a stage.

Indeed, the association of anger with positive energy or (hyper)activity is also attested in Zulu, where a number of anger-related expressions invoke the concept of *umoya*, literally meaning ‘wind, air’ as well as ‘spirit, soul,’ as the source of activity.²¹ In fact, an expression like *beka umoya phansi* (lower your *umoya*) meaning “calm yourself down!” or *umoya wakhe waphakama* (his *umoya* rose) “he became agitated, angry” show that anger is conceptualised in Zulu as ‘having a high *umoya*,’ that is being hyperactive (Taylor and Mbense 1998: 217).

In this sense, *mzuka* has a similar connotation to the Swahili word *mori* (wrath, rage), which, in the specific cultural context of Masai fighting, was conceptualised as positive energy and euphoria, necessary in order to face a difficult situation, such as the initiation ritual. Similarly, in the context of a performance, when the singer or dancer *amepanda mori/mzuka* (he/she has climbed up the euphoria/ghost), this means that he/she has lost self-control in order to perform well and make the audience feel excited.

Moreover, the term can also have the connotation of “desire” (*hamu*), for instance: *Nina mzuka kwenda kwenye muziki*. In Swahili Standard: *Nina hamu kwenda kwenye muziki* (I have the desire to go dancing) (Reuster-Jahn and Kiessling 2006: 160).

We recognise that, we need to consider Swahili cultural practices of traditional healing in order to understand the meaning of *mzuka*. Moreover, the term refers to a wide range of psychological states described in terms of “energy, hyper-activity, excitement,” acquiring different connotations according to the context of use, such as “anger, anxiety, desire, motivation.”

²¹ *Umoya*: 1. Wind, air, breath. *Umoya uyaphephetha* (The wind is blowing); *ukuphuma umoya* (to die). 2 spirit, soul, life (Doke et al. 1990: 508). Similarly, the Swahili word *pepo* (cl.5) “demon, spirit” is a synonym of *mzuka* and has the same lexical root as *upepo* (cl.11) (wind).

All the meanings described refer to the state of being out of control, in other words *mzuka* indicates a specific facet of the concept of “emotion,” similar to “euphoria, irrationality, uncontrollability,” which can have positive or negative effects; indeed, unlike *hisia*, *mzuka* does not occur in the description of bodily feelings.

3.3. *Mhemko* (emotion)

Mhemko (or *mhemuko*; pl. *mhemko* or *mihemko*) is derived from the verb *-hemka*: “be ecstatic, be inspired” (Mohamed 2011: 221) and is attested as a synonym of *hisia kubwa*, *jazba*, *mshtuko*, *mchomo wa moyo* (TUKI 2001; “strong feeling, emotion, shock, sharp pain in the heart”).

The noun *mhemuko* is glossed in English as “emotion, feeling, passion,” e.g. *Aliingiwa na mhemuko alipokuwa anawahutubia wanavijiji walionyimwa haki zao*, he was filled with emotion when he was addressing the villagers who were deprived of their rights (cf. *jazba*; Mohamed 2011: 471).

The term *mhemko* is indicated in Swahili dictionaries as a synonym of the Arabic loanword *jazba*, translated as “emotion, fanaticism, ecstasy, afflatus,” which is often used in religious contexts, e.g. *Mtu yule ana jazba sana katika mambo ya kidini*, that person is full of religious fanaticism (Mohamed 2011: 253).

In our monolingual dictionary, *mhemko* is reported as a noun of class 9/10 (pl. *mhemko*) which describes a specific state of emotion according to the context: *hisia kali anazokuwa nazo mtu k.v. hasira, mapenzi na waoga ambazo agh. husababishwa na mwenendo usononi, haiba au motisha* > Kiing (strong feeling towards someone, e.g. anger, love and fear, which is caused especially by bad humour, attractiveness or motivation). The noun derives from the verb root *-hemka* (*hemkwa*): “*patwa na hamu kubwa ya kufanya jambo*” (be overcome by a strong desire to do something); it is reported as a synonym of *jazba*, *ashiki*, *hamu*” (BAKIZA 2015: 294); *pandwa na hasira au hamu kubwa* (be overcome by anger or strong desire) (TUKI 2004: 113).

The noun is also found in cl.3/4: *mhemuko* (pl. *mihemuko*): *hisia aliyonayo mwanadamu pindi apatwapo na hasira, hofu au tamaa ya kufanya jambo fulani*; “a human feeling which occurs when people are overcome by anger, fear or the desire to do something”; it is a synonym of *msisimko* (thrill), *mwako* (burning) and *hamasa* (motivation) (BAKIZA 2015: 642).

According to Daines,²² *mhemko* can have different meanings according to its context of use, for example a state similar to “anxiety,” especially when someone is asking probing questions:

²² Interview with Dr. Dainse Sanga (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 19.01.2016)

Ile hali ya mtu, kuwa na kama haraka haraka ya jambo fulani, ana hamu... unaongea kuhusu jambo fulani halafu yeye anauliza haraka haraka “eh? ndo kulitokea hivi? halafu alifanya nini?” unaweza kumwambia: “subiri, mbona una mhemko? acha mchecheto.”

The condition of someone who is in a hurry for something, s/he is anxious...you talk about something and then s/he immediately asks: “Eh? So, is this what happened? And what did s/he do then?” you might tell him/her: “wait, why are you so anxious? Stop this nervousness”

In other contexts, *mhemko* is used to refer to love (*mapenzi*), e.g. *Yule ana mhemko kweli yaani, yule ana nyege...* (That person has strong desire, that is s/he has sexual desire); it can also have political connotation, e.g. *una mhemko ya cheo* (you are anxious about getting a position), that is, you have a strong desire for authority and status.²³

Moreover, Flavian²⁴ highlights the fact that *mhemko* is not a common state and can only occur in specific situations that are mostly related to anger or love:

Msukumo wa ndani anaopata mtu kutokana na kitu fulani. Mtu akiwa na muhemko anakuwa anaweza akawahi kukasirika, ama huyu ana muhemko wa mapenzi, anapata hisia za mapenzi haraka. Siyo tabia, mhemko hautokei kila wakati, kuna mazingira yanayoweza kusababisha muhemko.

Internal energy which manifests itself in someone as a reaction to something. A person who has *mhemko* can get angry very easily, or someone can have *mhemko* of love,... s/he is quickly aroused by love's desires. It is not a behaviour and *mhemko* does not always arise. There are specific situations which can provoke *mhemko*.

Mariam²⁵ also recognises that *mhemko* and the corresponding verb *-hemka*, often refer to physical love:

Mihemko ya mwili inatumika kwenye ashiki, mihemko (mwanamke na mwanamume), hisia hali unayoisikia unapomwona mtu fulani. Hali ya kujisikia kwamba unahitaji mtu fulani.

Mihemko of the body is used in reference to sexual desire – both in men and women-, a strong feeling that someone has when s/he sees someone else. The state of feeling that you need someone.

²³ Interview with Dr. Dainse Sanga (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 19.01.2016)

²⁴ Interview with Flavian Ilomo (Institute of Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 03.02.2016)

²⁵ Mariam Msafiri (BA in Swahili Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 25.01.2016)

3.4. *Msisimko* (thrill)

The term *msisimko* has a similar meaning, glossed into English, as “thrill, excitement, frisson,” from the verb *-sisimka*: tingle with fear/cold/excitement, cause the blood to run cold, raise hairs (TUKI 2001). However, compared with *mhemko*, the meaning of this term has a stronger bodily connotation.

The verb *-sisimka* is also attested as a synonym of *-hisi* (feeling) since it can refer to different emotional states: *hisi, huzunika, hofia au furahia kwa jambo lililokutokea* (feel, be sad, fear or enjoy something which happens to you) (BAKIZA 2015: 947).

This meaning is also shown by the definition of the verb *-sisimka* in the monolingual dictionary by TUKI: *-pata hisi fulani mwilini kwa sababu ya hofu au furaha* “to be overcome with a bodily feeling because of fear or joy” (TUKI 2004: 378).

Thus, unlike *hisia* and *mzuka*, the etymology of *msisimko* suggests a specific reference to a bodily reaction relating to different feelings according to the situation (e.g. fear/cold/excitement). As is shown by the definitions found in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, it describes the physical effect of an experience on the body, such as in a situation of fear or excitement: e.g. *Filamu ile ilijaa msisimko*, that film was full of thrills (Mohamed 2011: 522).

A similar definition is found in *Kamusi Kuu ya Kiswahili*, which also highlights the association of the term to the bodily reaction: *hali ya mshtuko wa mwili au hisia fulani inayompata mtu ghafla baada ya kuona au kusikia kitu au jambo fulani* (a condition of physical shock or a feeling which unexpectedly affects someone after seeing or hearing something) (BAKIZA 2015: 711).

The description of the noun *msisimko* also indicates a physical state provoked by strong desire, excitement: *hali ya mtu kuhisi mchomo au mshtuko wa ghafla mwilini baada ya kuona au kuingiwa na hamu kubwa ya kufanya jambo* (the condition of a person who feels sharp bodily pain or shock after feeling or being overcome with a strong desire to do something) (TUKI 2004: 276).

Thus, unlike *hisia*, which is also linked to body feelings, *msisimko* indicates a more specific aspect of emotional states, that is, a physical reaction which metonymically extends to emotional states.

4. Conclusions

This study has shown that Swahili has different verbs of perception: while the Bantu roots *-ona* “see” and *-sikia* “hear” have extended their meanings to refer to “feel,” the Arabic verb *hisi* has been borrowed, sometimes undergoing an ameliorative development (e.g. *hisi wivu*, to feel jealous with a positive meaning, that is “to admire someone”) or adding the specific connotation of “have the feeling,” in order to make suppositions. The Arabic root has also introduced a corresponding deverbative noun (*hisia*) to refer to the complex concept of “emotion.” The noun *hisia* is a general term

indicating bodily feelings (e.g. *hisia ya joto/baridi/njaa*, “feeling of cold/hot/hunger”) and non-physical domains (e.g. *hisia za mapenzi* “feeling of love;” *hisia ya furaha* “feeling of happiness”).

Speakers’ conceptualisation is also proof of the interconnection of inner feelings (*hisia za ndani*) and external manifestations (*hisia za nje*). Thus, we have shown that *hisia* has a wide semantic spectrum, similar to the English equivalent “feeling,” which refers to thought-related experiences (*hisia ya furaha*) as well as experiences which are exclusively physical (e.g. *hisia ya njaa*). However, the meaning of *hisia* does not involve all the aspects involved in the English concept of “emotion” (feelings, body and thoughts) at the same time. For instance, *hisia ya njaa* (feeling of hunger), *hisia ya baridi* (feeling of cold), etc. only reflect physical experiences.

Other terms have been identified which involve a more restricted semantic domain, thus indicating specific connotations of the concept of emotion. While most of the Swahili speakers interviewed indicated *hisia* as the closest equivalent of the English “emotion,” some of the students who responded to the questionnaire also indicated the word *mhemko* as a possible synonym. Even though its use is apparently less common than *hisia*, *mhemko* appears in the English-Swahili dictionary as the first lemma equivalent of “emotion” and is described in monolingual dictionaries as *hisia kubwa* (intense feeling) and *hisia kali*, (strong feeling), such as love, fear or anxiety. A similar meaning is conveyed by the term *msisimko*, whose literal meaning (thrill) is more bodily connoted and metonymically extends to the concept of anxiety, excitement, fear and sexual desire. Finally, the term *mzuka*, literally translated as “spirit, ghost,” is close to the semantic sphere of *mhemko*, since it refers to a state of ecstasy, unconsciousness or irrationality. Its meaning can be related to specific cultural practices in traditional healing, where the spirit is believed to “climb up” (*panda*) within the body and cause the person to feel ill or out of control. Thus, the term *mzuka* has a culture-bound meaning and often appears in the context of unusual emotional experiences, extreme excitement and euphoria (in particular during artistic performances, but also in situations of intense anger) or to refer to strong motivation or inspiration to do something.

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