

Swahili Codification of Emotions: A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis

Authors : Rosanna Tramutoli

Abstract : Studies on several languages have demonstrated how different emotions are categorized in various linguistic constructions. It exists in several writings on the codification of emotions in Western African languages. A recent study on the semantic description of Swahili body terminology has demonstrated that body part terms, such as moyo (heart), uso (face) and jicho (eye) are involved in several metaphorical expressions describing emotions. However, so far hardly anything has been written on the linguistic description of emotions in Swahili. Thus, this study describes how emotional concepts, such as 'love' and 'anger' are codified in Swahili, in order to highlight common semantic and syntactic patterns, etymological sources and metaphorical expressions. The research seeks to answer a number of questions, such as which are the Swahili terms for 'emotions'? Is there a distinction between 'emotions' and 'feelings'? Which emotional lexical items have Bantu origin and which come from Arabic? Which metaphorical expressions/cognitive schemas are used to codify emotions? (e.g. kumpanda mtu kichwani, lit. 'to climb on somebody's head', to make somebody feel angry, kushuka moyo, lit. 'to be down the heart', to feel discouraged, kumpa mtu moyo lit. 'to give someone heart', to encourage someone). Which body terms are involved as 'containers/locus of emotions'? For instance, it has been shown that moyo ('heart') occurs as container of 'love' (e.g. kumtia mtu moyoni, lit. 'to put somebody in the heart', to love somebody very much) and 'kindness' (moyo wake ulijaa hisani, 'his heart was filled with kindness'). The study also takes into account the syntactic patterns used to code emotions. For instance, when does the experiencer occur in subject position? (e.g. nina furaha, nimefurahi, 'I am happy') and when in object position (e.g. Huruma iliniingia moyoni, lit. 'Pity entered me inside my heart', 'I felt pity')? Data have been collected mostly through the analysis of Swahili digital corpora, containing different kinds of Swahili texts (e.g. novels, drama, political essays).

Keywords : emotions, cognitive linguistics, metaphors, Swahili

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