

Swahili is a language in the Bantu family, spoken in many countries throughout southeastern Africa. There are over 15 million native speakers and about 80–100 million others who use Swahili. The following Swahili words can be translated into English as full sentences:

<i>Swahili</i>	<i>English</i>
nitakupenda	I will like you
nitakulipa	I will pay you
nilikupenda	I did like you
nilimpenda	I did like him/her

The English sentences are made up of many words, which each have their own meaning. But the matching Swahili words are made up of smaller parts that have meaning. Linguists call these parts **morphemes**. So one language (like English) might say a particular meaning with words, while another (like Swahili) might say the same meaning with a single word made up of morphemes.

In fact, we can even see both types of ways to say one meaning in English. If we want to say that someone has better thinking skills than someone else, we might say that they are *more intelligent*, using two words. But we could also say that they are *smarter*, using one word made of two morphemes (*smart-er*). So languages can differ in whether a given meaning is said with separate words or with morphemes in a single word, and both methods might even be used within the same language!

Exercise 1. Identify the morphemes in the Swahili words above. How are they pronounced and what do they mean? What order are the morphemes in a Swahili word? Compare Swahili morpheme order to English word order. How are they the same? How do they differ?

Exercise 2. These examples reverse the actions described in the previous examples. How do we need to update our description of Swahili morphemes?

Swahili

utanipenda

utanilipa

ulinipenda

alinipenda

English

you will like me

you will pay me

you did like me

he/she did like me

Exercise 3. Translate the following Swahili words into their corresponding English sentences.

Swahili

nitampenda

alikulipa

utampenda

ulimlipa

atanipenda

English

Exercise 3. Translate the following English sentences into their corresponding Swahili words.

Swahili

English

he/she will like you

you will pay him/her

I will pay him/her

he/she did pay me

you did like him/her

Exercise 4. The Swahili morpheme *sumbua* means ‘annoy’. Translate the following Swahili words and English sentences.

Swahili

nitakusumbua

nilimsumbua

English

you will annoy me

he/she did annoy you

Exercise 5. The Swahili morpheme *na* means an action is happening right now. Translate the following Swahili words and English sentences.

Swahili

ananisumbua

unanilipa

English

I like you

you are paying him/her

Exercise 6. Using new information in the first two rows of examples below, translate the remaining Swahili words and English sentences.

Swahili

tutakupenda

alitulipa

tulikusumbua

utatusumbua

English

we will like you

he/she did pay us

we are annoying him/her

you like us

Exercise 7. Create more Swahili words! Try using *lala* ‘sleep’ and *enda* ‘go’. How do these verbs differ from the previous ones?