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The suffixes -*fu* and -*vu* in Swahili: a preliminary analysis

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The suffix -*u* in Swahili indicates a state, and it is primarily used with intrasitive verb roots and stative stems with pre-final {k}. Some transitive verbs may have both {u} and {i} ~ {aji} derivations applying to nouns *m*- and *wa*- classes (persons of Classes 1 & 2) focusing on state or activity respectively, e.g. -*angalia* (take care) › *mwangalivu* (careful/attentive person) and *mwangalizi* ~ *mwangaliaji* (caretaker, overseer, guardian). The suffix -*u* with nouns of classes 1 and 2 express the possessor of a state, and with nouns of *u*- class (Class 11) it expresses the state itself (Polomé 1967:78). The -*u* is realised as -*fu* and -*vu*, or -*ifu* and -*ivu*, and rarely as -*u*.

In a few cases -*u* occurs also in nouns of *ma*- class (Class 6) (Ashton 1944:326), e.g. *maumivu* (pain, pains) < *kuumia* (be injured/hurt) < *kuuma* (to cause pain, to hurt/injure/bite). Some adjective stems with -*fu* or -*vu* are derived from verbs (Ashton:46 “deverbative adjectives”):

-*bivu* (ripe)	<	*kuiva* (to ripen)
-*bovu* (rotten)	<	*kuoza* (to rot)
-*kuu* (great)	<	*kukua* (to grow)

Some verbs are derived from adjectives with -*fu* suffix:

-*chafu* (dirty)	>	-*chafuka* (become dirty)
-*chafu* (stormy)	>	-*chafuka* (become stormy)
-*refu* (long)	>	-*refuka* (become long)

A few items appear as “pure” adjectives:

-*ovu* (evil)
-*vivu* (lazy, idle)
-*wivu* (jealous)

According to Ashton (op cit.:286):

Verbs ending with two vowels	>	Noun ending in -*vu*
E.g. *kulegea* (be loose/lax)	>	*ulegevu* (slackness, weakness)
Verbs ending with -*ka*	>	Noun ending in -*fu*
E.g. *kupunguka* (be reduced)	>	*upungufu* (decrease, deficiency)

Consonant assimilation follows the following rules (Ashton ibid:323):

Unvoiced consonants /p/ & /k/ + /u/	>	/fu/
Voiced consonant /w/ + /u/	>	/vu/

"Apparent anomalies like -*tovu* (lacking) < -*toa* (lack), -*nyamavu* (quite) < -*nyamaa* (be quiet), are due to a submerged -*w*- and -*l*- respectively in the parent verb stem" (ibid).

Ashton (ibid.) observes that "These suffixes are inconsistent and overlap to a considerable extent," e.g. *kuokoa* (to save) > *mwokofu ~ mwokovu* (saviour), *wokofu ~ wokovu* (deliverance, salvation), and *kuchoka* (be tired) > *mchofu ~ mchovu* (weary, one who gets easily tired), *uchofu ~ uchovu* (weariness)

Polomé (op cit.:46) also notes that "Unpredictable alternations occur in certain phonemes: (1) neutralization of the contrast voiced : unvoiced for some obstruents, e.g. *kufuka ~ kuvuka* 'to give out smoke', *uchofu ~ uchovu* 'tediousness'; ..." Other alternations found in colloquial speech and dialects are:

-*vukuta ~ -fukuta* (burn without flame)
vukuto ~ fukuto ~ vuguto (burning on skin, heat felt in the body)
-*voromoa ~ -poromoa* (knock down, rush down, cause to fall)
-*voromoka ~ -poromoka* (glide/slip/fall down ie of water etc)
voromoko ~ poromoko (waterfall, avalance)
vundarere ~ fundarere (a kind of snake)
-*vinginya ~ -finginya* (wriggle), also -*vinginyika ~ -finginyika*, *vinginyiko ~ finginyiko*

As a general rule, Arabic loan verbs take -*ifu* (-*ivu* in a few cases of extended verbs) to form nouns:

-amini (believe, trust) > *mwaminifu* (trustworthy person) > *uaminifu* (trustworthyness, trustfulness)
-haribu (destroy) > *mharibifu* (destructive person) > *uharibifu* (destruction)
-sahau (forget) > *msahaulifu*/*-ivu* (forgetful) > *usahaulifu*/*-ivu* (forgetfulness)

In some adjectives and nouns, the final *-fu* is part of the root in Arabic loans, e.g. *ashirafu* (noble), *dhaifu* (weak), *hafifu* (of low quality), *maarufu* (famous) and *mwarifu* (knowledgeable person).

No dictionary gives all the *-u*, *-fu* or *-vu* items found in the language. Some dictionaries give the *-u* items only as adjectives, or as both adjectives and nouns of Classes 1-2, though they can only be used with persons in Classes 1-2; and in most cases the item is given also in nouns of Class 11, e.g. KAMUSI (1981) in which the *-marked items are not included:

-adilifu (uppright, righteous)	(*mwadilifu*)*, *uadilifu* (righteousness)
-angalifu (observant)	(*mwangalifu*), *uangalifu* (carefulness)
-aminifu (trustworthy)	(*mwaminifu*)*, *uaminifu* (trustworthiness)
arifu (well informed)	(*mwarifu*)*, (*uarifu*)* (state of being well-informed)
-halifu (disobedient, rebellious)	*mhalifu*, *uhalifu* (disobedience, rebellion)
-shupavu (brave, fearless)	*mshupavu*, *ushupavu* (bravery)
-badhirifu (wasteful)	*mbadhirifu*, *ubadhirifu* (wastefulness)
-potovu ~ -potofu (wayward, pervert)	*mpotofu* (*mpotovu*)*, *upotovu* (upotofu)*
-potevu (wasteful, prodigal)	(*mpotevu*)*, *upotevu* (wastefulness)
-zoevu (familiar, habitual)	(*mzoevu*)*, *uzoefu ~ uzoevu* (familiarity)
(*-kubalifu*)* (accepting)	(*mkubalifu*)*, *ukubalifu* (acceptance)

The following additional terms with *-fu* or *-v u* have been collected from colloquial Swahili and corpus other than dictionaries, and they are not included in KAMUSI (1981):

Class 1-2: *mbashirifu* (one forsees only negative things)
mbukufu (one who discloses secrets)
mbunifu (one who is inventing falsehood/lies)
mchelevu (one who is ususally late)
mchungufu (one who discloses secrets)
mchunifu (one who is always nagging, who is provokingly insisting)
mjubufu ~ mjubuvu (one who forces others to do things)
mwogofu (one who is easily frightened)

Adjectives: -*chakafu* (worn & torn)
-*rovu* (wet, humid)
-*teketevu* (combustible, inflammatory)
maarufu (famous)
mafu (e.g. *maji mafu*, low tide, ebb)

Nouns: *kiowevu* (sponge)
msafu (row/que, also safu/msafa)
uerevu (smartness, cleverness, usually werevu)
umaarifu (knowledge/intelligence, usually maarifa)
unyang'anyivu (robbing/robbery, tendency to rob)
usahaulivu (forgetfulness
ustahimilivu (patience)
utiivu (obedience)
utakatifu (holiness, purity, sanctity)

Quantitative breakdown:

53+ inherited items have -*vu* suffix.

78+ inherited items have -*fu* suffix.

14+ items have -*fu* and -*vu* alternation (including a couple with Arabic roots).

30+ adjectives and derived nouns of Classes 1-2 of Arabic origin have final -*fu* (or pre-final -*f*-) as part of the root or stem.

68+ other words ending in -*fu*, including a few ending in -*vu*, e.g. *jivu* (ash), *matomvu* (sap), do not 'on the surface' express any state or possession of a state.

There are no inherited verbs ending in -*fu* or -*vu*. All verbs ending in -*fu* are Arabic loans.

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Author's addenda

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Overlapping of *-fu* and *-vu* suffixes

In the Swahili usage of senior native speakers of the Kihadimu/Kikae dialect of Makunduchi and Kizimkazi in southern Unguja island, some alternatives with *-vu* have a nuance of emphasis or intensity, e.g. *mwokofu* (saviour) but *mwokovu* (great/real saviour), *mchofu* (tired) but *mchovu* (weary, exhausted).

In all the dialects of Zanzibar, the adverbial duplicated forms *rovurovu* and *vuruvuru* are met with, e.g. *alirowa* (he became wet) but *alirowa rovurovu* (he became completely wet), *alivuruga mambo* (he messed up things) but *alivuruga mambo vuruvuru* (he made a complete mess of things).