

Politeness Phenomena: A case of Kiswahili Honorifics

Habwe, John Hamu

Abstract:

This paper discusses Standard Kiswahili honorifics in Nairobi. It used observation as a means of obtaining data in Nairobi where Standard Kiswahili is also spoken. It points out that honorifics are a chief politeness strategy across many discourse domains; Kiswahili honorifics are conspicuously used and seem easy to learn; honorifics complement other politeness strategies; they are used in both formal and informal encounters. This paper also argues that honorifics in expressing face saving ideals in Kiswahili language have both a social and individual appeal. There is, therefore, a strong suggestion for social face and communal based politeness as opposed to individual politeness in Kiswahili. This paper observes that politeness and especially by means of honorifics makes a Kiswahili conversational encounter fruitful. The honorifics also help to define, redefine and sustain social strata that are used as a basis of expressing face-saving ideals and politeness in Kiswahili and hence contributing to less conflict in interaction and strengthening cohesion in society in question.