

# CHIMWIINI: ENDANGERED STATUS AND SYNTACTIC DISTINCTIVENESS

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Chimwiini is a highly endangered Bantu language, once spoken in the small town of Brava in Southern Somalia, but now spoken chiefly in refugee communities around the globe. Though often referred to as a dialect of Swahili, Chimwiini distinguishes itself strongly from standard Swahili at all levels of linguistics description. This paper presents the major factors that have led to Chimwiini's endangered status and examines some of the syntactic structures that distinguish Chimwiini from Swahili.

Le chimwiini est une langue sur le point de disparaître. Cette langue se parlait dans la ville de Brava au Sud de la Somalie, mais aujourd'hui elle ne se parle dans le monde que dans les communautés de réfugiés. Bien que le chimwiini soit reconnu comme un dialecte du swahili, cette langue se distingue fortement du swahili standard sur tous les plans linguistiques. Cet article a pour but de présenter les facteurs principaux qui ont mené à la disparition progressive du Chimwiini, et examine en second lieu certaines structures syntaxiques qui distinguent le chimwiini du swahili.

## 0. INTRODUCTION

This paper has two goals. The first is to report on the endangered status of Chimwiini, a Bantu language of southern Somalia often considered a dialect of Swahili. As I describe in section 2, Chimwiini has been transformed from the language of a small but stable group of speakers to a scattered and highly endangered language in only a few decades as a result of government policy and political turmoil. My second goal is to offer a preliminary report on some of the distinctive syntactic features of Chimwiini, when compared with the so-called Standard Swahili spoken in most of Kenya and Tanzania. Though Chimwiini is often characterized as a dialect of Swahili with only lexical and phonological differences, I will demonstrate that some strong syntactic differences are also observable. Thus far, published descriptions and analyses of the morphosyntax on Chimwiini have been minimal. This paper thus contributes to scholarly knowledge of Chimwiini as well as Swahili and Bantu languages more generally. I offer this grammatical sketch in section 3, covering basic facts regarding subject and object marking, possessives, reflexives, locatives, impersonal subjects, and relativization.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. ENDANGERED STATUS: A SMALL, BUT STABLE COMMUNITY OF SPEAKERS

For more than eight hundred years, the eastern coast of Africa from southern Somalia to Northern Mozambique has been home to relatively small, largely culturally-defined group of sea-faring African traders and artisans broadly known as the Swahili. Over the centuries, the Swahili language evolved to become a widely-known lingua franca in the East African interior and, eventually, a national language of Kenya and Tanzania. It

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has furthermore been adopted as an influential international language of diplomacy, used in international relations within Africa and taught widely at foreign universities in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Today Swahili is spoken by over 50 million people in Africa and beyond.

Of course, one result of this exponential growth of the Swahili language has been its nearly complete divorce from the coastal traders from whom it originated. The coastal dialects of Swahili, largely defined geographically by the cities they are spoken in, have evolved separately from the 'standard' Swahili *lingua franca* and received far less attention from linguists. Though typically referred to as Swahili 'dialects,' these varieties often strongly differ from standard Swahili at all levels of linguistic description, sometimes to the point of being unintelligible to those who speak only the standard variety.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I explore some of the syntactic structures present in one such dialect, Chimwiini. Chimwiini is the northernmost and most isolated of the coastal Swahili languages, and therefore one of the most divergent from other Swahili varieties. It has also been one of the most ignored by Swahili scholars.<sup>3</sup> For centuries, it has been spoken in the town of Mwiini, better known to outsiders as Brava or Barawa, in southern Somalia, just 200 kilometers south of Mogadishu. Though under heavy language contact with speakers of Somali, Af-Maay and other Cushitic languages, likely since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Chimwiini maintained a stable community of about twenty thousand speakers.

The factors that contributed to this stabilization under what would seem to be strong regional pressures for language shift have not been fully explored and make for an interesting topic on their own. It is likely that the distinct Swahili artisan and trading culture, unique in Somalia, as well as continued contacts with other Swahili communities in Kismayo, Mombasa, and Zanzibar likely served as a hedge against linguistic erosion. Another factor may have been the well-defined administrative structure of the town. Since at least the sixteenth century, Brava was ruled by a council of elders composed of leaders of the town's seven major clans (Vianello and Kassim 2006:30).<sup>4</sup> Five of these clans (the **shangamas**, or 'five clans' in Somali) are Tunni who speak Cushitic languages like af-Maay and af-Tunni. Though their clan ties often extended far beyond Brava, many Tunni lived in Brava itself or the immediately surrounding areas and speak Chimwiini as a second language. The other two clans are the Haṭiimi and Biḍaa, native Chimwiini speakers who were largely confined to the central areas of Brava defined by its white stone buildings. While an economic symbiosis between the people of Swahili coastal towns and those of the immediate interior is not uncommon (Horton and Middleton 2000: 125), the fact that this cooperation extended to town governance in Brava seems to be unique. It is possible that this level of political involvement by non-Swahili groups decreased the perceived 'otherness' of Bravanese culture by surrounding clans in Southern

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<sup>2</sup> Often this unintelligibility is asymmetric. Because of Standard Swahili's economic and political dominance, speakers of coastal varieties can often understand it well even if they do not use it regularly. The reverse is often not true, upon the dialect involved.

<sup>3</sup> For example, it is absent from the lists of Swahili dialects found in Amidu (1995) and Githiora (2002).

<sup>4</sup> This distinguishes Brava from other coastal Swahili towns, many of which developed a kingship or dynastic system of governance (Horton and Middleton 2000:157). This is completely absent from the history of Brava.

Somalia and limited the encroachment of Cushitic language and culture.<sup>5</sup> This distinguishes Brava from other Somali coastal towns to its north such as Merka and Mogadishu. Though very likely Swahili-speaking towns as well before the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Nurse and Spear 1985:59; Nurse 2009), the coastal peoples who continue to reside there (known as the Benadiri, after the common name for the southern Somali coast) speak a dialect of Somali and feel only a weak ethnic connection to the coastal Wamwiini and Bajuni to the south.

## 2. DESTABILIZATION AND ENDANGERMENT

Whatever the factors responsible for the stabilization of Chimwiini over the past six hundred years, the situation has changed drastically within the past forty years largely due to political maneuverings and war. At least three major changes can be identified that drastically affected the linguistic situation in Brava.

First, in 1969, President Siad Barre came to power in a military coup and immediately began instituting changes inspired by scientific socialism and Somali nationalism. One of the first and strongest policy changes was to adopt Somali as the national language and institute a standard orthography for it. The reasons for the focus on language policy were to decrease the importance of colonial languages like Italian and English as well as to erode the divisions of clanism that Barre was convinced were the primary barrier to national unity. By 1972 all government officials were required to speak and write Somali and it was instituted in all public schools, including the school in Brava. Reports from the Bravanese indicate that this shift was not entirely ill-received. As a minority group that depended upon trade for economic stability, the Bravanese were traditionally 'cosmopolitan,' most speaking several languages in addition to Chimwiini (including Somali and Arabic) and being comfortable with outside cultures. Furthermore, the Bravanese have for centuries had a strong scholarly tradition rooted in Islamic education and jurisprudence that has led to strong positive values being placed on education in general (see Banafunzi 1996). It is therefore not clear that the imposition of the Somali language as an official language had a major impact on the knowledge and use of Chimwiini in Brava.

However, the second major destabilizing factor came soon after. A multi-year drought in the mid-1970s led to the deaths of millions of livestock amongst Somali pastoralists. In response, thousands of Somali pastoralists were relocated to government-created agricultural and fishing cooperatives in southern Somalia. This included a fishing cooperative founded in Brava at which 5,000 former pastoralists were relocated. The fishing cooperative was a failure, but many of the relocated Somalis remained in Brava, severely altering the cultural character of the city as these newcomers had no connection to Brava and no knowledge of Chimwiini (Mukhtar 2002). Given that most Bravanese were bilingual in Somali, this inevitably led to greater use of the Somali language in public contexts and shifts away from Chimwiini.

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<sup>5</sup> Another factor may also be the relative isolation of Brava. Vianello and Kassim (2006) note that even at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, getting to Brava from Mogadishu was considered a dangerous task. They also note that, unlike Merka and Mogadishu, Brava has no safe anchor point for large ships. This prevented colonial forces from ever establishing a strong presence in the town.

One wonders, had time marched on in this situation, how destabilizing these changes might have been to Chimwiini as the town language of Brava. Given the rather cosmopolitan nature of Bravanese culture and high levels of multi-lingualism with Chimwiini, Tunni, and Somali, it is possible that Chimwiini would have continued to have a stable speaker base in Brava, even as Somali gained ground as a public language. This must remain a supposition, however, since the third and most important factor in the endangerment of Chimwiini was the eruption of civil war in Somalia in the early 1990s. Somalia quickly plunged into chaos. With no strong clan alliances and no weapons for defense, Somalia's minority groups, particularly those in the south, suffered greatly. The Bravanese were no exception as militia groups raided and occupied the town, subjecting its inhabitants to theft, rape, and murder.<sup>6</sup>

Those who could leave Brava did so by whatever means possible, including navigating the dangerous waters of the Indian Ocean in over-crowded boats to other coastal ports. Many perished in the journey. Most fled to Kenya in 1991-92 where they then spent years in refugee camps in Mombasa and elsewhere. Then in 1996-97, thousands of Somali minorities were granted refugee status by the United States and United Kingdom. This included as many as half the Chimwiini-speaking population. Many who did not leave Kenya exploited family connections with the Swahili communities in Mombasa and other coastal Swahili towns to resettle there. Today, the largest communities of Bravanese reside in London and Manchester in the UK, Atlanta and Columbus OH in the US, and in Mombasa. A small community also continues to reside in Brava itself, but their residence there remains precarious. The town is occupied by the militant Islamist group Al-Shabaab and reports are that they are systematically eradicating the Bravanese culture by destroying cultural and religious landmarks, taking Bravanese wives by force, and discouraging the use of Chimwiini in public.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in just three decades, Chimwiini has gone from having a stable community of speakers to having its speakers scattered across the globe. As in any immigrant community, the pressures to shift from Chimwiini to the more dominant language are great. In visits to Columbus, Atlanta, and St. Louis over the past two years, I have observed that, though Chimwiini is typically used in the home, speakers under age twenty five often do not know the language well. Furthermore, Bravanese communities are often in some ways dependent upon 'fitting in' with much larger Somali refugee communities in the US, especially where refugee services are strongly tailored to the latter. There is thus some pressure to shift to Somali (which many Bravanese speak well) in many public contexts. Chimwiini thus must be considered highly endangered and unstable.

Sadly, Chimwiini remains largely undocumented. A wonderful exception is found in the decades-long collaboration between Charles Kisseberth and Mohamad Imam Abasheikh, a native speaker of Chimwiini and revered member of the Bravanese community who passed away in 2009. In particular, Kisseberth (2010), Kisseberth and Abasheikh (2009, 1976a, 1974) have closely studied the fascinating phonological systems

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<sup>6</sup> A similar fate befell the Bajuni of Kismayo and the far southern Somali coast (who speak yet another dialect of Swahili) as described by Nurse (2009). Other minority groups, such as the Somali Bantu (who actually speak Cushitic languages such as af-Maay) were also severely victimized (see Besteman 1999).

<sup>7</sup> I have seen pictures of this destruction. Many of the local mosques and the tombs of the great Bravanese religious leaders (most centuries old) have been utterly destroyed for no other reason but to eradicate Bravanese cultural presence.

of Chimwiini while Kisseberth and Abasheikh (2004) offers a detailed linguistic lexicon of the language. Morphosyntactic work on Chimwiini is largely limited to Abasheikh's 1978 thesis on Chimwiini causatives and a few other papers (Abasheikh 1976; Kisseberth and Abasheikh 1976b).<sup>8</sup>

### 3. SOME DISTINGUISHING SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF CHIMWIINI

Vitale (1981:9) states that 'the major differences between dialects [of Swahili] are primarily lexical and phonological rather than morphological or syntactic.' To an extent, this is true. Certainly some of the most noticeable distinctions between Chimwiini and standard Swahili have to do with its lexicon and phonological system. Chimwiini has many borrowings from Somali, for instance, and in many cases the Somali pronunciation of such words is maintained. Furthermore, Chimwiini is strongly similar to Swahili (and many other Bantu languages) in its basic morphological and syntactic structures. For instance, like Swahili, Chimwiini is an SVO language that allows for restricted but substantial flexibility of this basic word order. It also displays the standard set of verb derivation suffixes used to augment argument structures (causative, applicative, stative, and reciprocal), employs an associative construction like the one shared by most Bantu languages, and has a noun class system similar in structure to Swahili's. Nevertheless, strong differences at both the morphological and syntactic level are easily found. This section offers a presentation of some of the syntactic features of Chimwiini that distinguish it from the so-called 'Standard Swahili' used in much of inland Kenya and Tanzania. The format of this presentation is largely descriptive, though some notes for theoretical consideration may be made. All work is preliminary and based upon interviews and notes made during a six-week stay with the Bravanese community in Atlanta GA in 2009, as well as upon unpublished notes of Kisseberth and Abasheikh (referenced as Kisseberth and Abasheikh 2001; henceforth K and A 2001).

#### 3.1 PRONOUNS AND SUBJECT AGREEMENT

It is well-known that standard Swahili has two sets of pronouns: a bisyllabic 'strong' set of pronouns rarely used in argument positions except for focus/emphasis, and a monosyllabic 'weak' set that are used anaphorically to reference topics, and also occur in object positions of verbs and prepositions. In Chimwiini, however, the former set does not exist. Rather, only a weak, monosyllabic set is used. The paradigm is provided in (1).

(1) Chimwiini personal pronouns

	singular	plural
1	<b>mi</b>	<b>si</b>
2	<b>we</b>	<b>ni</b> <sup>9</sup>
3	<b>ye</b>	<b>wo</b>

<sup>8</sup> For the historical linguistic connections between Chimwiini and other Swahili and Sabaki languages, see Nurse et al (1993).

<sup>9</sup> Kisseberth (p.c.) informs me that at least some speakers may use a dental nasal in the second person plural pronoun. More work is needed to determine the facts.

Unlike in Swahili, pronouns are common in all argument position and carry no emphatic implication. This is even true in direct object position when the pronoun is also typically agreed with by an object marker on the verb. The higher frequency with which personal pronouns are used in Chimwiini compared to Swahili may be partially explained by the fact that Chimwiini's subject agreement paradigm is morphologically reduced. Specifically, Chimwiini has no subject agreement prefixes for second or third person singular. Rather, third person singular is marked by the absence of any agreement morpheme and second person singular (along with second plural and first singular and plural) is marked by an accent shift: while accent typically falls on the penultimate syllable of phrases in Chimwiini, in first and second person (both singular and plural) verb phrases, it falls on the final syllable.<sup>10,11</sup> Furthermore, phonological rules of vowel elision and nasal assimilation often lead to a high degree of homophony in the present tense. In such cases, pronominal arguments can be used to disambiguate:

(2) Subject Agreement Markers<sup>12</sup>

	sing	plural
1	<b>ni-/N-</b>	<b>chi-/sh-</b>
2	<b>Ø-</b>	<b>ni-/n-</b>
3	<b>Ø-</b>	<b>wa-</b>

(3) a. **(mi) n-naa-ku-yá**  
I 1SG-PRES-INF-come  
I am coming.

- b. **(we) Ø-naa-ku-yá**                    you (sg) are coming  
c. **(ye) Ø-naa-kú-ya**                    she/he is coming  
d. **(ni) n-naa-ku-yá**                    you (pl) are coming

Finally, pronominals in Chimwiini are frequently used to resume a full noun phrase in some constructions. For example, the subject of an embedded clause may appear to the left of the complementizer that introduces the embedded clause while a coindexed pronoun (optionally) occurs to the right of the complementizer, as in (4)<sup>13</sup>.

(4) **Hasaani /ø-aminile            Ahmaad<sub>i</sub> / kuwaa (ye<sub>i</sub>) / ø-nazo    akiili**  
Hasani    3SG-believe.PST    Ahmad    COMP    him    3SG-have intelligence  
Hasani believes that Ahmad is smart (lit. has intelligence)

<sup>10</sup> The prosodic phrasing system of Chimwiini responsible for accent placement (as well as rules of vowel length) is complex and has been the source of much insightful theoretical work on the interaction of syntax and phonology. See Kisseberth and Abasheikh 1974, Selkirk 1986 and, more recently, Kisseberth and Abasheikh 2009, Kisseberth 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the shift to final accent seen in first and second person constructions is present only in present and past tenses. In other tenses, there is no such shift, collapsing second and third person forms to an even greater degree.

<sup>12</sup> Regular rules of vowel elision (and spirantization in the case of 1pl) result in the allomorphs listed here. The symbol N represents an underspecified nasal that assimilates to an immediately following consonant.

<sup>13</sup> Forward slashes / are used to indicate phonological phrasing. Accent is on the penultimate syllable of each phrase unless otherwise marked in the data.

### 3.2 OBJECT MARKING

As in Swahili, object markers can be used to mark an overt or null object noun phrase. In the former case, they typically add a degree of topicality to the object, though it is uncommon to find an object marker co-occurring with an overt object. This is not the case with [+human] objects, however. Similar to Swahili, object marking is strongly preferred with [+human] objects, though I have collected numerous examples where it is omitted.<sup>14</sup>

- (5) a. **Mi / ni-m-eene**                      **Muusa / muda ye iiló.**  
 I    1SG-3SG.OBJ-see.PST    Musa    time    he    come.PST.REL  
 I saw Musa when he came.
- b.    ?? **Mi / m-beene** **Muusa / muda ye iiló**

Also like Swahili, only one object may be marked on the verb at a time, and this must always be the indirect object in double object constructions. Direct objects cannot be object-marked when an indirect object is present:

- (6) a. **Fatiima / Ø-wa-pele**                      **waana / maanda**  
 F.            3SG-3PL.OBJ-give.PST    children    9bread  
 Fatima gave the children bread
- b.    \***Fatiima Ø-yi-pele**                      **waana / maanda**  
 Fatima    3SG-CL9.OBJ-give.PST    children    9bread

With certain verbs that take a non-finite clausal complement, the subject of the embedded clause may be object-marked on the verb. This would seem to involve so-called subject-to-object raising (7a) and object control constructions (7b), but further investigation is needed to determine whether this is the correct analysis:

- (7) a. **mi n-na-m-suḷa**                      **Muusá / x-shinda maṭeezo**  
 I    1SG-PRES-3SG.OBJ-want    Musa    INF-win    game  
 I want Musa to win the game.
- b.    **ni-xu-rebele**                      **x-panda**                      **baskiḷi=y-á**  
 1SG-2SG.OBJ-forbid.PST    INF-climb.on    bicycle=CL9-1SG.POSS  
 I forbade you to ride my bicycle                      (K and A 2001:91)

In addition to these cases, object marking is also employed in a construction that can be used to convey inalienable possession and part-whole relationships. Here object marking marks the possessor/whole while the subject of the clause is the possessed/part. The verb is often in the applied or causative form, though this is not true for all cases (as

<sup>14</sup> The preference seems to be even stronger with [+human] objects that are proper names or personal pronouns.

in 8b). Note that the subject need not display the possessive suffixes associated with possession.

- (8) a. **kuulu / i-n-vund-ish-iile**  
 3leg CL3-1SG-break-CAUS-PST  
 My leg broke on me (Lit. The leg made me break)
- b. **chita / chi-m-pozele Ali**  
 7head CL7-3SG.OBJ-hurt.PST Ali  
 Ali's head hurts (Lit. The head hurt Ali) (K and A 2001:64)

The fact that the possessor/whole governs object marking and appears in object position in (8) suggests that it is a true grammatical object of the verb. However, unlike other objects, the possessor/whole NP in (8) cannot undergo passivization while maintaining the meaning in (8):

- (9) \***Ali / Ø-pozela na chitta**  
 Ali 3SG-hurt.PST.PASS by 7head  
 Ali was hurt by (his) head.

It is possible that the facts in (9) do not reflect a syntactic restriction on the passivization of the possessor, but rather reflect an interpretative restriction on the constructions in (8). That is, perhaps the interpretation of the sentences in (8) crucially depends upon the syntactic forms involved. Applying syntactic transformations such as the passive to these structures thus causes the loss of this interpretative possibility. More research on this point is clearly needed to determine the proper analysis.

The status of this construction in standard Swahili is unclear. I have not seen discussion of it in the Swahili linguistic literature; however, it does seem to be used, though in a more limited way. For example, native Swahili speakers I consulted judged the equivalent of (8a) to be ungrammatical; however, (10b) was accepted as common.

- (10) a. \***Mkuu m-li-ni-vunjik-i-a** Swahili  
 3leg CL3-PST-1SG.OBJ-break-APPL-FV  
 My leg broke on me.
- b. **Tumbo li-na-ni-ume** Swahili  
 5stomach CL5-PRES-1SG.OBJ-ache  
 My stomach aches.

### 3.3 POSSESSION

Chimwiini displays a wider range of possessive constructions than Standard Swahili and more work is needed to fully investigate these constructions. However, some preliminary notes can be made. First, possession may be indicated by use of the associative construction, as in Swahili.



- (11) **Chibuku ch-a Nuuru / chi-béele.**  
 7book CL7-ASSC Nuru CL7-lost.PST  
 Nuru's book is lost.

However, possession is also commonly indicated by use of possessive pronouns that may or may not co-occur with a full NP possessor. These pronouns consist of an agreement marker that agrees with the possessed followed by an element that indicates the possessor. For singular possessors, these pronouns appear as monosyllabic enclitics on the possessed NP while for plural possessors they are bisyllabic words. The pronominal paradigm is given in (12).

- (12) Possessive pronouns
- |   | sing | plural |
|---|------|--------|
| 1 | -a   | -iitu  |
| 2 | -o   | -iinu  |
| 3 | -e   | -aawo  |

- (13) a. **nuumba=y-e**                      b. **zisu z-iinu**  
 9house=CL9-3SG.POSS                      8knives CL8-2PL.POSS  
 his house                                      your (pl) knives

There are also non-clitic alternates for the singular possessive enclitics that may be used for emphasis. These take the form of adding the syllable **-ak**, making them similar to their Swahili cognates and perhaps suggesting that the enclitic possessives are a reduced form of the associative construction.

- (14) **numba y-aak-e**  
 9house CL9-AK-3SG.POSS  
 his house

Interestingly, a full NP possessor may co-occur in the noun phrase with the possessive morpheme. Typically, such a possessor precedes the possessed-POSS NP and is phrased separate from it prosodically. However, it may also follow the possessed NP, in which case it is phrased together with it. This latter construction (seen in 15b) was rejected by some speakers, but found at least somewhat acceptable by others, indicating it may be generally less acceptable or possibly subject to dialect variation.

- (15) a. **Ali Ø-nenzeze Nuuru / gari=y-e**  
 Ali 3SG-go.CAUS.PST Nuuru 9car=CL9-3SG.POSS  
 Ali drove Nuru's car.
- b. ? **Ali Ø-nenzeeze gari=ye Nuuru**

The data in (15) contrasts with Standard Swahili in which the equivalent of (15b) is acceptable while the equivalent of (15a) seems to be completely unacceptable.

- (16) a. \***Ni-li-endesha**      **Aisha**      **gari i-ake.**      Swahili  
 1SG-PST-go-CAUS-FV      Aisha      5car CL5-3SG.POSS  
 I drove Aisha's car.
- b. **Ni-li-endesha**      **gari i-ake Aisha.**

Finally, in Chimwiini a possessive relationship may also be expressed by placing the possessor in the indirect object position and the possessed in the direct object position of a verbal predicate and having the verb object-marked for the possessor. In this case, no possessive morphology occurs on either NP and the associative is not used.

- (17) **Hamadi / Ø-m-vunzile**      **Nuuru / kuulu**  
 Hamadi      3SG-3SG.OBJ-break.PST      Nuuru      9leg  
 Hamadi broke Nuru's leg.

This would seem to be a case of so-called possessor raising. The fact that the possessor is in fact the indirect object of the verb and not a part of the same NP as the possessed is shown by the fact that the verb agrees with the possessor and not the possessed. Another piece of evidence is that the possessor NP may be passivized, leaving the possessed NP in object position.

- (18) **Nuuru / Ø-vuzila**      **kuulu**  
 Nuru      3SG-break.PST.PASS      9leg  
 Nuuru's leg was broken. (Lit. Nuru was broken the leg)

Like the possessive object-marking construction discussed above in section 3.2, the possessor raising construction seems to be limited to cases of inalienable possession and part-whole relationships. Similar facts have been noted for Standard Swahili (Keach and Rochemont 1992):

- (19) **ni-li-m-songoa**      **Juma**      **shingo.**      Swahili  
 1SG-PST-3SG.OBJ-twist      Juma      9neck  
 I twisted Juma's neck..      (Keach and Rochemont 1992:82)

#### 3.4 REFLEXIVES AND INTENSIVES

One of the most apparent differences between Chimwiini and standard Swahili is found in the syntax of reflexives. Swahili and many other Bantu languages employ a non-agreeing object marker to convey the reflexive meaning of a verb. Thus, in Swahili, the object marker **ji-** causes the subject of a predicate to be understood as the object of the verb as well (see 20a). However, Chimwiini lacks this morphological way of marking reflexives. Instead, it employs a set of lexical reflexive pronouns composed of the word **ruhu** 'soul' plus the possessive suffix. Abasheikh (1979) suggests that the loss of the reflexive morpheme and adoption of reflexive pronouns are due to influence from Arabic.

- (20) a. **Watoto wa-li-ji-piga.** Swahili  
 children 3PL-PST-REFL-hit  
 The children hit themselves.
- b. **Waana / wa-bishile ruhu z-aawo** Chimwiini  
 children 3PL-hit.PST self-10AGR 3PL.POSS  
 The children hit themselves.

The full paradigm appears below using the verb **ku-luma** ‘to bite’:

- (21) (mi) **n-dumile ruuhu=y-á** I bit myself  
 (we) **Ø-lumile ruuhu=y-ó** you (sg.) bit yourself  
 (ye) **Ø-lumile ruuhu=y-e** (s)he bit him-/herself  
 (si) **chi-lumile ruhu z-iitú** we bit ourselves  
 (ni) **n-lumile ruhu z-iinú** you pl. bit yourselves  
 (wo) **wa-lumile ruhu z-aawo** they bit themselves

As Abasheikh (1976) shows, the **ruhu**+POSS constructions behave similarly to reflexive pronouns in English, being subject to Principle A of the binding theory: they must be locally bound by their closest antecedent. This fact, as well as the ambiguous nature of these anaphors, is illustrated in (22). Here a reflexive interpretation of the direct object **ruhuya** is blocked, but it may be interpreted as a possessed NP meaning ‘my soul.’

- (22) **M-peelee Ali ruuhu=y-á**  
 1SG-give.PST Ali 9soul=CL9-1SG.POSS  
 \*I gave Ali myself.  
 I gave Ali my soul. (Abasheikh 1976:17)

Though Chimwiini does not employ the reflexive object marker **ji-**, there is a phonologically similar marker **i-** that seemingly appears in the object marker position and which sometimes conveys a kind of reflexive meaning, often indicating that an action was performed for the benefit of oneself. The marker always appears with an applied form of the verb. Contrast the following:

- (23) a. **Hamadi / Ø-oloshele ku-laala**  
 Hamadi 3SG-leave.PST INF-sleep  
 Hamadi went to sleep.
- b. **Hamadi / Ø-oloshele ki-‘i-laal-ila**  
 Hamadi 3SG-leave.PST INF-INT-sleep-APPL  
 Hamadi went to sleep on his own. (K and A 2001:30)

However, this is not the only meaning this marker may convey. It may also be used as an intensifier, indicating that an action was done simply on its own.<sup>15</sup>

- (24) a. **N-na-x-sula ki-'i-laal-ila**  
 1SG-PRES-INF-want INF-INT-sleep-APPL  
 I just want to sleep (that's all)

The sentences in (23-24) are strongly reminiscent of Eastman's (1967) discussion of the intensifier suffix in Kimvita, the traditional Swahili dialect of Mombasa. Unlike in Chimwiini, however, in Kimvita there is no distinct morpheme in the object marker position. Rather, the applicative form of the verb is simply used to indicate intensification. Eastman describes the function of the intensive as equivalent to stressing the action of the verb in English:

- (25) a. **Mtu huyu a-li-inua kiti**  
 1person 1this 3SG-PST-pick.up 7chair  
 This man picked up the chair.
- b. **Siku moja a-li-inua kiti**  
 9day one 3SG-PST-pick.up 7chair  
 One day, he *did* pick up the chair. (Eastman 1967:114)

### 3.5 LOCATIVES

Another contrast between Swahili and Chimwiini is found with locative subjects. In the standardized system of Bantu noun classes (Meinhoff 1948), classes 16-18 are reserved for locative nouns. These three classes are used to designate locations that are specific (class 16), general (class 17), or inside/enclosed (class 18). While some Bantu languages have noun class prefixes that correspond to these classes, Swahili and Chimwiini do not. Rather, locative nouns are indicated by a nominal suffix **-ni**. In addition, in some Bantu languages, locative nouns may serve as the subject of a clause, triggering subject agreement on the verb and leaving the logical subject (if present) in a post-verbal position, often with an interpretation of focus (see Bresnan and Kanerva 1989, Buell 2007, among others). Standard Swahili allows such 'locative inversion' constructions. In (26), subject agreement with the locative ranges over classes 16-18, depending upon the interpretation of the locative noun. Note also the locative subject need not have the **-ni** suffix, but need only semantically define a location, as in (26b).

- (26) a. **Chumba-ni mu-li-kuwa muzuri.** Swahili  
 7room-LOC CL18-PST-be 18nice  
 In the room was nice.

<sup>15</sup> James Essegbey (p.c.) points out to me that (23b) also has a kind of intensive meaning, and that in Ewe both the meanings in (23b) and (24) would be expressed by an intensifier. If the morpheme in question here is simply an intensifier, then its similarity in form and position to a benefactive reflexive may simply be a coincidence.

- b. **Nje ya chumba ku-li-kuwa ku-zuri.**  
 outside CL9-ASSC 7room CL17-PST-be CL17-nice  
 Outside the room was nice. (Buell 2007:106)

Unlike Swahili, locative inversion is not possible in Chimwiini. Indeed, class 16-18 agreement prefixes do not seem to be active in Chimwiini in clauses or in the associative construction. The equivalents of (26) in Chimwiini are ungrammatical. A locative NP may appear in the preverbal position in Chimwiini, but the verb displays impersonal ('default') class 9 agreement rather than any locative agreement marker (see section 3.6).

- (27) **ndiláa=ni / i-pitanéena** (K and A 2001:49)  
 9road=LOC / CL9-pass.RECIP.PST.PASS  
 On the road there was passing of one another.

The only place where there is evidence for class 16-18 in Chimwiini is in demonstratives and in the locative copula. Demonstratives show evidence for all three noun classes while the locative copula shows evidence for classes 17 and 18. The expected class 16 locative copula **-po** is seldom used and often rejected in favor of class 17.

- |      |          |              |               |                |
|------|----------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| (28) |          | near speaker | near listener | away from here |
|      | Class 16 | <b>apa</b>   | <b>apo</b>    | <b>apaje</b>   |
|      | Class 17 | <b>uku</b>   | <b>oko</b>    | <b>ukuje</b>   |
|      | Class 18 | <b>umu</b>   | <b>omo</b>    | <b>umuje</b>   |

- (29) a. **Nii-mo nuumbaní**  
 1.SG-LOC.COP 9house  
 I am in the house
- b. **Chii-ko Ifuwó**  
 1.PL-LOC.COP 11beach  
 We are at the beach.

### 3.6 IMPERSONAL PASSIVES

Another strong difference between Swahili and Chimwiini concerns the use of impersonal subjects in passive constructions. While Swahili allows impersonal subjects (indicated by class 9 subject agreement), this is limited to particular weather-related verb and a few other cases:

- (30) a. **I-na-ny-esha nvua** Swahili  
 CL9-PRES-rain-CAUS-FV rain  
 It is raining.
- b. **I-me-ele-w-a**  
 CL9-PERF-understand-PASS-FV  
 It is understood.

Chimwiini, however, allows impersonal subjects with statives (31a) as well as with the passives of transitive or unergative verbs (32-33). They may not occur with unaccusative verbs, however (as seen in 34). Finally, the displaced subject of an impersonal passive may not be expressed in a by phrase as in personal passives (see (32b,33b)). The equivalents of these data in Swahili are simply ungrammatical.

- (31) **apa / ha-y-bool-ek-i / chiint<sup>h</sup>u** (K and A 2001:34)  
 here NEG-CL9-steal-STAT-NEG 7thing  
 here there is no stealing anything
- (32) a. **waana wa-imbile n-dimbo**  
 2children 3PL-sing.PST 10-song  
 The children sang songs.
- b. **i-imbila n-dimbo \*(na waana)**  
 9AGR-sing.PST.PASS 10-song by children  
 Songs were sung. [Lit. It was sung songs]
- (33) a. **waana wa-leele apa**  
 2children 3PL-sleep.PST here  
 The children slept here.
- b. **i-leelel apa \*(na waana)**  
 9AGR-sleep.PST here by children  
 People slept here. [Lit. It was slept here]
- (34) a. **chi-ti sh-poteele**  
 7-chair 7AGR-fall.PST  
 The chair fell.
- b. **\*i-poteela chi-ti**
- c. **\*i-poteela apa**  
 9Agr-fall.PST.PASS here  
 People fall here.

### 3.7 RELATIVE CLAUSES

Much attention has been paid in the literature to the variety of relative clause structures allowed by Swahili (Barrett-Keach 1985; Ngonyani 1999, Henderson 2004, among others). In Chimwiini, such variation is not found. Rather, relative clauses in Chimwiini are marked primarily by the presence of a final accent on the relative clause constituent (in contrast to the default penultimate marking of the accent in most other environments). In most affirmative tenses, the final vowel of the verb also changes to **-o**. One might recognize this as the so-called ‘**o** of reference’ found in Swahili relatives (Ashton 1959:18); however note that in Chimwiini the **-o** does not display agreement with the relativized noun phrase, nor does it appear in all environments. It is absent in relatives in which the verb is negative or passive, for instance.

- (35) a. **uyu ni maana / Ø-fakeet-ó**  
 1this COP child 3SG-run.PST-REL  
 This is the child who ran away.
- b. **Ni Fatiima / Ø-wak-il-ila nuumbá / (na Muusa)**  
 COP Fatima 3SG-build-APPL-PST.PASS 9house by Musa  
 It was Fatima whom was built a house for (by Musa).

Note the examples in (35) reflect subject relativization. In non-subject relatives, the head of the relative clause is introduced by the associative marker which agrees with the head. Again, this contrasts with Swahili in which typically the relative complementizer **amba** together with the agreeing ‘-o of reference’ introduces a non-subject relative.

- (36) **Nt<sup>h</sup>anu y-a Fatiima / Ø-pikililo mandá i-vundishiile**  
 9oven CL9-ASSC Fatima 3SG-cook-APPL-PST-REL 9bread CL9-break.PST  
 ‘The oven that Fatima cooked the bread in broke.’

Interestingly, the associative marker may be dropped just in case the subject of the clause is null or post-verbal (VS order being generally allowed in Chimwiini). In that case, again the only relative marking is the final accent and in some cases the final vowel –o.

- (37) **Nt<sup>h</sup>anu / Ø-pikililo Fatimá / mandá i-vundishiile**  
 9oven 3SG-cook-APPL-PST-REL Fatima 9bread CL9-break.PST  
 The oven that Fatima cooked the bread in broke.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The paper has reported on two aspects of ongoing work on the documentation of Chimwiini: the status and causes of its highly endangered status and the description of its syntactic structure. Regarding the former, we have seen that Chimwiini illustrates the fragility of small yet stable groups of speakers in the face of political turmoil. On the latter, the fragments of Chimwiini syntax reported on here suggest that there is a much greater variation amongst the dialects of Swahili than is commonly recognized. In particular, Chimwiini was shown to differ strongly from standard Swahili in its agreement paradigm, possessive constructions, and relative clause formation, as well as in other areas.

## ABBREVIATIONS

1,2,3	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> person	APPL	applicative
SG, PL	singular, plural	PASS	passive a
number + CL	noun class	FV	final vowel
	agreement marker		
thus, CL9 =	noun class 9 agreement;	REFL	reflexive
number before a noun	indicates noun's		
noun class			
OBJ	object marker	INT	intensifier
PRES	present	LOC	locative
INF	infinitive	COP	copula
PST	past	RECIP	reciprocal
COMP	complementizer	PERF	perfective
POSS	possessive	NEG	negative
ASSC	associative	STAT	stative
REL	relative clause	=	clitic
CAUS	causative	underlining	dental consonant

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