



Kenya GP Kiswahili Tutorial

A formal classroom strategy would say “Learn the language in order to start ministry”. But language learning is actually a ministry in itself.

Working on language learning has three benefits:

1. Demonstrates the posture of a learner
 - a. Rather than approaching a new culture with a superior mindset (i.e. ‘I’m bringing something to you’), language learning puts newcomers into a position of humility. The hosts are the experts, and we are the learners.
2. Builds bridges
 - a. Learning a language communicates that we are interested in the host culture. Rather than staying comfortable in our own language and ways of doing things, we are demonstrating our willingness to cross a divide and learn someone else’s way of doing things. Even basic efforts in this can yield tremendous fruit.
3. Makes friends
 - a. It may be hard at first to identify what we have in common with people from the host culture because we didn’t grow up in the same cultural mix. Language learning provides an easy connection point from the start. It provides a context for friendship and relationship. One word of caution though, we learn language to enhance relationships. We don’t make relationships in order to learn language.

Three tips to get you started:

- Learn 5 words a day.
 - Whether at home or in Kenya, setting a small goal for yourself can really help.
- Practice, practice, practice!
 - Repeat what you have learned to yourself. Practice on real people. Do this a lot. It’s the best way to remember what you have learned. Use it as much as you can!
- Memorize a basic greeting.
 - Memorize the greetings phrases at the end of this lesson!

Alphabet

The Swahili alphabet is the same as the English alphabet with a few exceptions:

- no C
- no Q
- no X

But there is a CH which makes the 'ch' sound as in chips.

The remaining consonants have the same sound as English.

There are five vowels:

- A E I O U
- The vowels are pronounced only one way – the same as in Spanish.

There are a few consonant combinations that are unique. These are not all of them, but representative of the ones you might hear the most:

- DH dhambi (sin) DHAM-bee
- MB mbwa (dog) MM-bwa
- MW mwaka (year) MWA-ka
- MZ mzuri (good) mm-ZOO-ree
- NG ng'ombe (cow) nn-GOM-bay
- NY nyoka (snake) NYO-ka

Pronunciation

The emphasis is always on the penultimate (next-to-last) syllable.

- Tafadhali ta-fa-DHA-lee
- Mzuri mm-ZOO-ree
- Mungu MOON-goo

Nouns

The most important thing to know is that in Kiswahili nouns change at the beginning of the word.

Kiswahili breaks nouns into eight classes based on the singular-plural form, and by certain categories (such as people, inanimate objects, etc.). We will not go through all eight classes. But we will look at four of the most important.

M-Wa class (personal)

Mtoto	(child) is singular
Watoto	(children) is plural

The stem (ie toto) carries the meaning. M or Wa tells you if it is singular or plural.

Ki-Vi class (things)

Kitabu	(book) is singular
Vitabu	(books) is plural

M-Mi class (natural things)

Mti	(tree) is singular
Miti	(trees) is plural

N class (catchall)

This class is important because it doesn't follow the rules of the other classes – there are no singular or plural forms. Some items in this class don't have singular or plural (such as maji – water) and some you have to be able to tell from context (such as ndizi – banana).

Chakula	(food)
Maji	(water)
Nywele	(hair)
Ndizi	(banana)

Verbs & Sentences

In Kiswahili, the verb is not conjugated. Infinitive forms use 'ku' at the beginning to indicate 'to'. For example:

kutaka	to want
kupenda	to love
kuja	to come
kula	to eat

If the verb has more than two syllables, it drops the 'ku' when it is the main verb in a sentence. Otherwise it retains the 'ku'.

For sentences, Kiswahili uses markers to indicate subject and tense. When you make a simple sentence, you only need to worry about three parts.

1. Subject (Personal Pronoun) marker
2. Tense marker
3. Verb

Here are the Subject Markers:

ni	I
u	you
a	he, she
tu	we
m	you (pl)
wa	they

Here are the Tense Markers:

na	Present
li	Past
ta	Future
me	Present Perfect (uses 'have' or 'has' in English)

They are put together like this: Subject marker + Tense marker + Verb

Let's use the verb 'to love' (kupenda) and put it all together.

Penda is more than one syllable so we drop the 'ku'.

Ni+na+penda	=	Ninapenda	=	I love
U+na+penda	=	Unapenda	=	You love
A+na+penda	=	Anapenda	=	He/she loves
Tu+na+penda	=	Tunapenda	=	We love
M+na+penda	=	Mnapenda	=	You all love
Wa+na+penda	=	Wanapenda	=	They love

Let's try changing it to past tense.

Ni+li+penda	=	Nilipenda	=	I loved
U+li+penda	=	Ulipenda	=	You loved
A+li+penda	=	Alipenda	=	He/she loved
Tu+li+penda	=	Tulipenda	=	We loved
M+li+penda	=	Mlipenda	=	You all loved
Wa+li+penda	=	Walipenda	=	They loved

Let's look at future tense.

Ni+ta+penda	=	Nitapenda	=	I will love
U+ta+penda	=	Utapenda	=	You will love
A+ta+penda	=	Atapenda	=	He/she will love
Tu+ta+penda	=	Tutapenda	=	We will love
M+ta+penda	=	Mtapenda	=	You all will love
Wa+ta+penda	=	Watapenda	=	They will love

Present Perfect

Ni+me+penda	=	Nimependa	=	I have loved
U+me+penda	=	Umependa	=	You have loved
A+me+penda	=	Amependa	=	He/she has loved
Tu+me+penda	=	Tumependa	=	We have loved
M+me+penda	=	Mmependa	=	You all have loved
Wa+me+penda	=	Wamependa	=	They have loved

Let's try present tense with a verb that has only one syllable = kula (to eat). We do not drop the 'ku' this time since 'la' is only one syllable.

Ni+na+kula	=	Ninakula	=	I am eating
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U+na+kula	=	Unakula	=	You are eating
A+na+kula	=	Anakula	=	He/she is eating
Tu+na+kula	=	Tunakula	=	We are eating
M+na+kula	=	Mnakula	=	You all are eating
Wa+na+kula	=	Wanakula	=	They are eating

Useful Phrases for Greetings

Bwana asifiwe!

Jina langu ni _____.

Nimeokoka.

Ninajifunza Kiswahili lakini sijui sana.

Praise the Lord!

My name is_____.

I am saved.

I am learning Swahili but I don't know much.