

‘LOVE’ ENCODING IN SWAHILI: A SEMANTIC DESCRIPTION THROUGH A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS¹

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Several studies have described emotional expressions used by speakers from different linguistic and cultural areas all around the world. It has been demonstrated that there are universal cognitive bases for the metaphorical expressions that speakers use to describe their emotional status. There are indeed significant differences concerning the use of emotional expressions, not only across languages but also language-internally. Quite a number of studies focus on the language of emotions in several European languages and languages of West Africa, whereas not enough research has been done on this regard on Eastern African languages.

The purpose of this paper is to give new insights into the linguistic encoding of ‘love’ in Swahili, a Bantu language widely spread as lingua franca in many Eastern African countries. The article examines the use of love-oriented terms across different Swahili literary texts. The study is based on the analysis of love-related lexical items (synonyms, etymology, and registers) and on the semantic conceptual map that can be traced by analysing the use of love figurative language (such as, common metaphorical phrases and body terms used as *locus* of love).

There are different semantic connotations associated to the terms for ‘love’ *mapenzi* and *mahaba*. Moreover, by analysing Swahili bodily functions in relations to emotional experiences, we can find that love is associated both with hot and cold. But there are many different contexts for ‘love’ in Swahili that still need to be investigated and which go beyond this textual analysis.

What is ‘love’?

The analysis of different terms related to the concept of ‘love’ is fundamental in order to describe different facets of this complex emotional status in Swahili culture. The lexical analysis is a key to understanding the agents involved and the contexts in which these terms are used. The Greek philosopher Plato, in his works *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, had distinguished different types of ‘love’ associated with different Greek terms: *éros* (ἔρως), ‘love, passion, desire’; *philia* (φιλία) affection, attachment, friendship (among individuals, cities, communities); *agápē* (ἀγάπη), love, affection, charity of God and for God; *storgē* (στοργή), the spontaneous love among siblings,

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persons who feel to belong to the same family, clan; *xenia*, friendly disposition towards the foreigners, hospitality.² Case studies, both on European and non-European languages, on emotions, such as ‘love’, ‘fear’, ‘anger’, ‘shame’, have shown that describing emotions in different cultural contexts, is much more complex than the linguistic ‘labels’ used to refer to them. There are a few linguistic studies on ‘love’ encoding in different languages, e.g. Stasik on Hindi (2009); Grabowska on Bengali (2009) and Díaz-Vera on English (2015). As regards the African context, most of the studies on emotions concern West African languages and mainly focus on the description of other emotions such as ‘anger’ (Ansah 2011, McPherson & Prokhorov 2011) and ‘jealousy’ (Ameka 2002). A relevant contribution to the description of emotions in Bantu languages is the analysis of metaphorical expressions of ‘anger’ in Zulu (Taylor & Mbense, 1998), which has shown how specific elaborations of the metaphors and metonymies differ in Zulu and English. On the other hand, specific studies on the description of ‘love’ encoding in African languages seem scarce. The study on ‘love’ encoding in Hausa (Batic 2011) offers new insights in the description of the conceptual and lexico-grammatical means adopted by Hausa speakers to express ‘love’ and love-related concepts. For instance, the employment of the verb *so* ‘want’ in Hausa to express love-related concepts represents the volitional component of love/desire, which is particularly widespread in the African context (*Ibid*:148). Khamis study on love in the Swahili taarab lyrics has shown how the images for the different facets of love are culturally related; in fact, the metaphors and icons used to describe ‘love’ in taarab reflect the cultural exchange through intercontinental trade and are impregnated with local practices (Khamis 2004:61).

All these studies have highlighted that it is important to consider both the universal conceptualisation of love (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Kovecses 1986) and its lexical and semantic description in a specific culture.

Data collection and analysis

In the first phase of the research, I collected data through several Swahili dictionaries, and from the novel, *Kiu*, ‘Thirst’ (Mohamed 1972), in order to create a pick list of ‘love’ terms and start the analysis through the corpus. After working on different pick lists, I have elaborated a restricted list containing the most relevant terms (14 entries), i.e. common nouns for ‘love’ and ‘lover’, and I used them to investigate the complete literary corpus of the UNIOR (University “L’Orientale” of Naples).

² The definitions of the ancient Greek words are taken from Montanari et al. (2003)

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The digital corpus is composed of different types of Swahili texts, mostly belonging to the genre of contemporary literary prose.³ Thus, most of the examples of poetic texts are extracted from the anthology of Swahili love poetry *A choice of flowers. Chaguo la Maua*, (Knappert 1972), which is not part of the digital corpus. For the corpus analysis, I have used the software *Concordance* (see Fig. 1), which allows processing a huge number of texts quickly and simultaneously while also questioning the occurrences and the concordances.

I have also integrated the corpus analysis with a few interviews with Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir (MAU),⁴ who particularly helped me in understanding and analysing the meaning and use of poetic terms and Arabic loanwords.

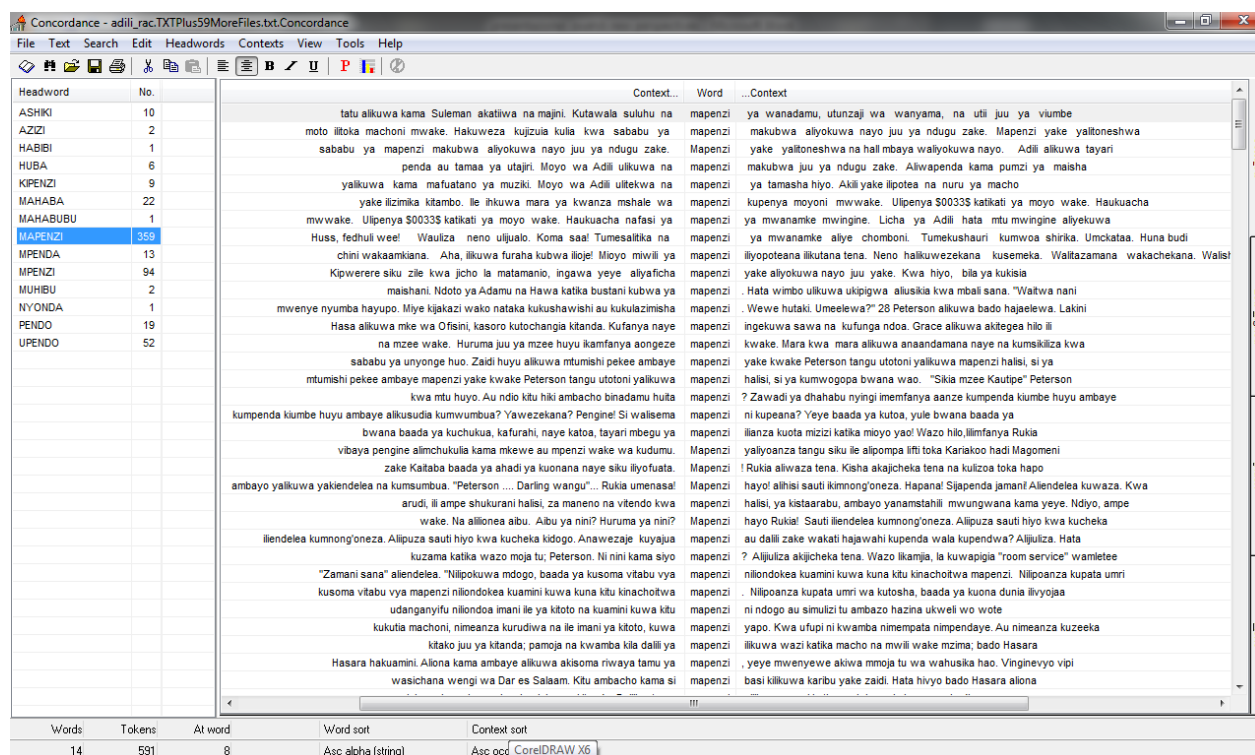


Figure 1 Screenshot of the software Concordance page

Looking at those lexical items, which have been selected as part of the restricted pick list, I observed and analysed different aspects of love encoding in Swahili.

³ A complete list of the Swahili sources of the corpus of the UNIOR is contained at the end of this paper.

⁴ Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir (MAU) is a Swahili poet from Lamu, who has been hosted by the University of Bayreuth during his research visit in March 2015. He is also a renowned intellectual and Imam in Lamu and he writes his poems in Kiamu.

First, I will describe the synonyms identifying their etymology and context of use. In Swahili, the most common term for ‘love’ is *mapenzi*, from the Bantu root *-pend-*. Another common synonym for ‘love’ is *mahaba* (in Arabic *mahabba*), derived from the Arabic root /ħbb/. However, there are other nominal and verbal Swahili items derived both from the Bantu root *-pend-* and the Arabic root *-ħbb-*, for instance:

-pend- → *kupenda, mapenzi, mpenzi, mpendwa, upendo, pendo*
-ħbb- → *mahaba, muhibu*

In the following sections, I will analyse in detail the meaning and context of use of these lexical items and other Arabic loanwords.

Terms derived from the Bantu root *-pend-*

The common verb form derived from this root is the Swahili verb *kupenda*. This verb has different meanings, for instance ‘like’: *Aliulizwa kazi apendayo na alijibu kuwa anapenda kazi ya kuuza duka* (He was asked which job he likes and he answered that he likes to be a shop keeper), (adi)⁵; ‘love’: *Mpende akupendae* (Love the one who loves you); ‘will’:⁶ *amefanya kwa kupenda kwake* (he did of his own will). (TUKI 2001:263) The nominal items derived from the same root, belong to different classes, having specific semantic features and contexts of use, as we will see in the following sections of this paper.

Mapenzi

Mapenzi is the most common Swahili noun for ‘love’, indeed it had 359 occurrences compared to just 22 of *mahaba*. This term not only refers to ‘romantic love’ but also extends to other contexts of use with a broader meaning. The examples below, extracted from the corpus, show that *mapenzi* is also used in the context of blood relationships (*uhusiano wa damu*), such as among siblings (*ndugu*), or indicating a sense of universal fraternity (*udugu*).

Hakuweza kujizuiq kulia kwa sababu ya mapenzi makubwa aliyokuwa nayo juu ya ndugu zake. (adi)⁷

She could not stop crying because of the great **love** she had for **her siblings**.⁸

Ni maisha ya kidugu kabisa. Kuna wasichana sita. Wewe utakuwa wa saba.

⁵ The abbreviations in brackets indicate the source of each example. A list of abbreviations of the Swahili sources of the corpus and the corresponding references is at the end of this paper.

⁶ Indeed, it should be remarked that the root *-pend-*, in religious contexts, has more than one connotation, covering both the semantic domain of ‘love’ and the semantic domain of volition (will); for instance, see *upendo wa Mungu* (God’s love) and *mapenzi ya Mungu* (God’s will).

⁷ The abbreviations in brackets indicate the source of each example. A list of abbreviations of the Swahili sources of the corpus and the corresponding references is at the end of this paper.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, English translations are mine.

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Tunaishi kwa mapenzi, udugu na kusikilizana. (ute)
It is really a family life. There are six girls. You will be the seventh. We live with **love, fraternity** and harmony.

*Uhusiano wa damu ndugu zangu mzito mno,
na mapenzi ya Afrika nzima kama samaki na maji. (kicho)*
Blood relationship my brothers is very solid,
and **love** of the whole Africa is like fish and water.

Furthermore, the relationship between parents (*wazazi*) and their children, is also described as *mapenzi*, in fact, the mother’s eyes are full of love, (lit. ‘the sea of love’, *bahari ya mapenzi*), for her child.

[...] *alichukuliwa kwenye utamu wa mapenzi ya wazazi wake alipokuwa bado ananyonya ziwa la mamake. (dum)*
[...] he was taken from the sweetness of **parents’ love** while he was still being breastfed by his mother.

Bahati alimtazama mama yake machoni na mle akaiona bahari ya mapenzi na huruma. (kiu)
Bahati looked her **mother** in the eyes and there she saw a **sea of love** and compassion.

Huikumbuka taabu anayopata mama yake, uvumilivu na mapenzi anayompa. (kiu)
She remembers the troubles her **mother had**, her patience and her **love** for her.

Mapenzi ya mama hayajui sura na rangi. (nyo)
lit. **The love of a mother** knows neither the appearance nor the colour.

Bali hakumwambia, kwa kujua kuwa mapenzi yake ya kimama hayatampa kustahimili vitendo vya Idi. (kiu)
Instead, she did not tell her, as she knew that **her maternal love** would have not let her endure Idi’s actions.

In the corpus there are only a few examples in which the term *mapenzi* is associated with ‘physical love’, and it mostly occurs in the expression ‘*kufanya mapenzi*’, (‘to make love’). There are some examples in which *mapenzi* is described as a concrete act, like in the sentences below, in which the lovers are showing (*kuonyesha*) their love in a bar, and *mapenzi* between young people is described as a feeling that doesn’t go beyond the act of kissing (*mabusu*).

Kufanya naye mapenzi ingekuwa sawa na kufunga ndoa. (dsm)
To make love with her would be the same as to get married.

Walipomaliza chupa zilizoagizwa na Kristina, walianza kuonyesha mapenzi yao ndani ya bar. Kristina alianza kuzungumza amemshika Tumaini begani. (duni)
When they finished the bottles ordered by Kristina, **they started to show their love in the bar**. Kristina started to talk while holding Tumaini by the shoulder.

Alishakuwa na ma-boyfriend akiwa shuleni na hata chuoni, lakini mapenzi yao yaliishia kwenye hatia na mabusu. (sok)

She had already **several boyfriends** when she was at school and also at the University, but **their love** didn't go beyond **kissing**.

Whereas *mapenzi* is rarely associated with 'physical love', there are quite a number of sentences in which this term is associated with more elevated emotional experiences, such as *huruma* (pity, compassion). Indeed, *huruma* and *mapenzi* appear as if they can hardly be distinguished. In fact, the feeling of empathy and support towards the other person can easily turn into love. In some examples, *mapenzi* refers to an elevated feeling, such as the love that characterizes an intimate mother-child relationship:

Alijua vyema kuwa mama yake tu ndiye mwenye huruma na mapenzi naye ya kweli. (kiu)

She knew well that **her mother** was the only one **with real compassion and love** for her.

Kitu kama maumivu au huruma hivi kwa mtu huyo. Au ndio kitu hiki ambacho binadamu huita mapenzi? (dsm)

Something similar to pain or **compassion** for this person. Or isn't it that thing that human beings call '**love**'?

Huruma juu ya mzee huyu ikamfanya aongeze mapenzi kwake. Mara kwa mara, alikuwa anaandamana naye na kumsikiliza kwa makini. (dsm)

The **compassion** toward this old men made her **love** him more and more. She was accompanying him and attentively paying attention to him

Aibu ya nini? Huruma ya nini? Mapenzi hayo Rukia! (dsm)

Which shame? Which **compassion**? This is **love** Rukia!

Mapenzi is also associated with an idea of 'true/real' love (*mapenzi ya kikweli* or *mapenzi halisi*) and 'eternal' love (*mapenzi ya milele*), which is able to overcome any social restriction or convention (such as *ndoa*, 'marriage').

Huu ni ulimwengu wa ndoa za mapenzi; siyo tena ulimwengu wa kugawa mabinti kama zawadi kwa watu wasiowapenda. (dun)

This is a world of **love marriages**; it is not anymore a world where girls are given as gifts to people who don't love them.

Ndoa yao, aliwaza, itakuwa ya mapenzi ya kikweli, haitafanana na ya Kidawa aliyepewa mume kwa lazima. (kiu)

Their **marriage**, she thought, will be a marriage of **real love**, not like Kidawas, who was forced to marry her husband.

Maisha ya starehe ni maisha ya mapenzi ya kweli na masikilizano. (kiu)

A happy life is a life of **real love** and understanding each other.

Miaka mitano imepita tangu Idi na Bahati kulishana kiapo cha ndoa na kuahidiana

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mapenzi ya milele. (kiu)

Five years have passed, since Idi and Bahati gave each other the **marriage vow** and promised to each other **eternal love**.

The meaning of ‘true’ *mapenzi*, is to take care of each other, *kulindana*, to help each other *kusaidiana*, to be tolerant *kuvumiliana* and show respect *heshima* toward the other person, as we observe in the examples below:

"Labda ni mapenzi," nilisema moyoni. Niliona kwamba mapenzi yako duniani ili viumbe waweze kulindana. Niliona kwamba bila mapenzi viumbe wasingeweza kuishi. "Sabina je?" nilianza kufikiri. Ilikuwa lazima tulindane sisi na watoto ambao tutapata. (kima)

“Maybe it is **love**”, I said to myself. I saw that your **love** is in the world so that the creatures can **protect each other**. I saw that without love the creatures could not live. “What about Sabina?” I started to think. We should have been **protecting each other** and the children that we will have.

Waliishi katika hali ya mapenzi, kuvumiliana na kusaidiana taabuni. (kima)
They lived a **life of love, understanding and helping each other** in troubles.

Msichana anayekataa jambo kama hilo ndiye anayekuheshimu, na heshima huenda pamoja na mapenzi. (kima)

A girl who refuses something like that, is the one who respects you and **respect goes together with love**.

Pole sana, bwana'ngu; hayo ndiyo mapenzi halisi. Mapenzi ni kuvumiliana ili kutunza heshima na siri ya mwenzio. (kima)

Very sorry my fellow; this is the **real love**. Love is to tolerate each other in order to preserve **the honour** and the secrecy of the other person

Upendo

Upendo is a term that frequently occurs in the corpus in socio-political texts. It is a term of class 14, thus it has a more abstract connotation compared to *mapenzi* (class 6). In fact, it rather indicates an idea of ‘social love’, similar to the Greek concept of *philia* (φιλία) or *storgē* (στοργή). That is a sense of solidarity, which involves different members of the society: *wanakijiji* (villagers), *wanajamii* (society’s members), *watanzania* (Tanzanians), *familia* (families), *wananchi* (citizens), *makabila mbalimbali* (different ethnic groups):

Anga lilijaa vuguvugu la imani na upendo wa wanakijiji hawa juu yake. (njo)
The sky was full of the movement of faith and **love** of these villagers for him.

Katika kiwango cha taifa kitendo hicho kinakusudia kujenga ushirikiano, umoja na upendo miongoni mwa makabila mbalimbali na hivyo kuwa na taifa imara. (san)

At a national level, this act aims to build cooperation, unity, and **love** among the different ethnic groups and so having a strong nation.

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*Dhima ya hadithi hii ilikuwa ni kuonya juu ya uchoyo na wivu na kusisitiza **upendo** na umoja miongoni mwa wanajamii.* (san)

The role of this story was to warn on egoism and jealousy and to stress **love** and unity among the members of the society.

*Watanzania wana sifa ya pekee duniani ya **upendo**, umoja, mshikamano, uchangamfu na kupenda amani.* (uwa)

The Tanzanians are famous in the world for **love**, unity, solidarity, cheerfulness and love for peace.

Indeed, there are only a few examples, in which *upendo* describes ‘love’ as an ‘individual feeling’.

*Moyo wa msichana ulikuwa unawaka moto wa **upendo** mzito kuliko wote mtoni pale.* (njo)

The heart of the girl was burning with an intense **love** more than everybody else there at the river.

*Kitu kikali kikapita kikiukata moyo wa Kiligilo na kufungulia mkondo mzima wa **upendo** ambao hakupata kuuhisi tena maishani.* (njo)

Something sharp passed and cut the heart of Kiligilo, opening a whole stream of **love** that he had never felt in his life again.

[...] *macho yale yenye **upendo** na upole mwingi yalimwangalia tena usingizini.* (njo)
[...] those eyes full of **love** and kindness looked at her again while sleeping.

Whereas the expression *mapenzi ya Mungu* is associated with will, ‘the will of God’, the expression *upendo wa Mungu* is referred to ‘the love of God’ towards his creatures, as in this example:

*Watu walisema kwamba kuna Mungu mwenye **upendo** na haki kamili.* (njo)
People said that there is a God, who has **love** and real justice.

Pendo

The term *pendo* belongs to class 5, and has probably a more concrete meaning than a noun of class 14, like *upendo*. The deverbative suffix -O indicates the action, the instrument or the result of it (Bertoncini 2009). Even though there are not enough occurrences of this term to prove its concrete connotation, there are more occurrences of this term in poetry than in prose, where it is used rather as a synonym of *mapenzi*, referring to lovers’ relationship, often in sayings or proverbs:

[...] *yale mahaba yake juu yangu yataniwezesha kumlipa **pendo** kwa **pendo*** (kar)
His love for me will make me to reward his **love**

*Peo la **pendo** ni busu - peo la chuki ni nini?* (kun)
What you get from **love** is kissing – what do you get from hate?

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(Mapenzi) Si jambo la kuhadithia, huijui tamu ya **pendo** mpaka ulionje. (ute)
(Love) It is not something to tell about, you don't know the sweetness of **love** until you taste it.

Akasubiri kwa hamu huku akiombea siku ambapo bahati ingemjia na kumfanya Kiligilo kulihisi **pendo** hili na kumridhia. (njo)
She waited with desire while she was praying for the day when the fortune would arrive and make Kiligilo feel this **love** and please her.

In the examples extracted from love poetry, *pendo* is mostly depicted as the cause of torment through unrequited love.

*Sababu ni **pendo** lako
yamenijaa mapenzi
pendo langu halijesha
dilo liloniadhibu
lakini makosa yangu
wala jingine hapana
kulitoa **pendo** langu
bila **pendo** kulibana
pendo letu la thamani
pendo lisilo hiyana
mimi sina tabasamu
pendo lauma maini*

The cause of it is my **love** for you,
I am filled with love⁹
my **love** has not yet ended
that is what tortures me¹⁰
but my mistake
and nothing else is to blame
was that I gave my **love**
without pressing for **love**¹¹
our precious **love**
is a **love** without deceit¹²
I am without a smile
love aches in my heart¹³

Love addressing terms

Both in the corpus and in dictionaries, I found several deverbatives from *kupenda* (to love), which are used to address the lover: *mpenzi*, *mpendwa*, *mpenda* (cl. 1), *kipenzi*, (cl.7). They can be translated as ‘beloved, darling, dear person’, although they have different connotations, according to their context of use and the agents involved. When they are followed by a possessive, (es. *mpenzi wangu*, ‘my lover’), are usually addressing to lovers. These terms are used both in literary texts (prose and poetry) and in common speech, also referring to friends or relatives.

Mpenzi

Mpenzi is a deverbative form in –I, the archaic suffix of Proto-bantu, with the phonetic change D > Z. This is attested as the oldest type of deverbative suffixes for Swahili nouns (Bertoncini

⁹ Knappert 1972: 28.

¹⁰ Ibid: 18.

¹¹ Ibid: 27.

¹² Ibid: 44.

¹³ Knappert 1972: 29.

2009: 235). The term *mpenzi* is indeed the most frequently used as an addressing term for the ‘lover’, and is sometimes followed by a possessive.

Nitakuoa, mpenzi, tuwe pamoja milele. (kiu)
I will marry you my love, let’s be together forever.

Idi akamwambia, "Mpenzi sikia nikwambie." Bahati akashtuka na kumjibu, "Usiniite mpenzi". (kiu)
Idi told her, “**Darling**, listen what I have to tell you.” Bahati was surprised and replied “Don’t call me **darling**”.

Walionekana kama mtu na mpenzi wake ambao ndio kwanza wanatoka kufunga ndoa. (dsm)
They seemed like a person and her **lover** who have just got married.

Apart from lovers’ usage, we find *mpenzi* also referred to a friend or a relative, often with the possessive. Some common expressions are, for instance, *baba yangu mpenzi* (my dear father), *rafiki yangu mpenzi* (my dear friend), *mke wangu mpenzi* (my dear wife), *mme wangu mpenzi* (my dear husband)

Mpenzi is also referred to God in the expression “*Mungu Mpenzi*” (‘beloved God’) or in the construction with *-a* of relationship, *mpenzi wa Mungu* ‘the beloved of God’:

Mungu Mpenzi alikuwa anaturuhusu kuja ulimwenguni. (kima)
The **beloved Lord** had allowed us to come to the world.

Ewe, Bwana Mtume, mbora wa viumbe vyote, mpenzi wa Mungu wako, kiongozi wa haki, wa kuomba ukapata! (kiu)
Ewe, Lord Prophet, the best of all the creatures, **the beloved of your God**, the leader of justice, what you pray for, you will get it!

Mpenda

There are not many occurrences (only 13) of the term *mpenda* in the corpus. In most of the cases, it occurs followed by an object, as for most of these types of deverbative forms (Bertoncini, 2009: 233). As we can observe from the examples, the construction *mpenda* + N (object), describes a particular behaviour or characteristic of a person. Differently from *mpenzi* and *mpendwa*, it seems more related to the idea of ‘like’ than to the idea of ‘loving’ something or somebody.

Mbona vitabu vingi vinasema ukiwa mpenda dansi oa mpenda dansi. Ukiwa mpenda sinema oa mpenda sinema? (kima)
Why many books say if you are a **fan of dancing** marry a fan of dancing. If you are a **fan of cinema** marry a fan of cinema?

[...] *Japhet hakuwa mpenda kazi hata kidogo.* (sok)
[...] Japhet was not at all **one who loves working**.

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Mpendwa

Mpendwa is a noun derived from the verb *kupendwa*, the passive form of *kupenda*. It is similar to *mpenzi*, as it can address both the beloved person (lover) and friends or siblings. However, in the corpus, we find fewer occurrences than *mpenzi*:

Kaka mpendwa, moyo wangu siku hizi hauna raha. (kima)
My **dear** brother, my heart does not have happiness these days.

Mpendwa songa karibu tushikane mikononi. (kun)
My **beloved**, come close and let's hold our hands.

Kipenzi

Kipenzi is a diminutive form of *mpenzi* in cl.7. The form *kipenzi cha + N* often refers to the beloved person of somebody and it follows the agreement of cl. 7 (*kipenzi cha, kipenzi changu*) even if it indicates an animate being, probably suggesting an emphasis of affection and tenderness.

Huyu ndiye alikuwa Stella; kipenzi cha baba yake. (ros)
This was Stella; the **beloved** of her father.

Mimi siponi Mussa, nakufa, na kifo changu kimesababishwa na ubaya wangu mwenyewe, na hasa uchungu wa Maimuna aliyekuwa kipenzi changu. (ute)
I don't recover Mussa, I die and my death is caused by my evil itself, and mostly by the pain of Maimuna who was **my lover**.

Rarely, the expression *kipenzi cha* refers to an inanimate object instead of a person, like in this example, where it refers to *ngoma* (dance):

Hii ndio ngoma inayoitwa beni, kipenzi cha wanawake na watoto hapa. (tat)
This is the dance called "beni", **the favourite** of women and children here.

The term *kipenzi* can also directly precede or follow the correspondent noun, in these cases having rather the function of an adjective, with the meaning of 'dear, beloved'.

Alimkumbuka kwanza kipenzi mama yake, marehemu Sengumba, uchungu mkuu ukampata moyoni. (njo)
He remembered for a moment **her dear mother**, the deceased Sengumba, he felt great pain in her heart.

The self-standing noun *kipenzi*, often followed by the possessive, (*kipenzi changu* similar to '*mpenzi wangu*'), can be translated as 'my love' and often occurs in poetry, when the poet addresses his woman.

Arabic loanwords

In Swahili, there are several loanwords concerning the semantic domain of ‘love’, many of them are derived from the Arabic root /ḥbb/. The Arabic word for ‘love’ derived from this root is *ḥubb*,¹⁴ ‘love, passion, affection, attachment, fondness, liking, fancy’ (Dziekan 2009). In Swahili there are several nouns derived from this root:

mahaba /huba ‘love’
habibi/habiba ‘darling’
mahabubu (muhibu, muhebi, muhabu), ‘beloved’

Mahaba

A common Arabic loanword is the term *mahaba* (class 6), which has much fewer occurrences (22) than the Bantu synonym *mapenzi*. In prose, it mostly occurs in the context of the description of ‘physical love’ in the sexual domain. As we can observe in the examples below, *mahaba* often refers to sexual intercourse, as in the expression *kufanya mahaba* (cfr. *kufanya mapenzi*):

Alipomshika na kumtupa kitandani, na kisha wakafanya mahaba kimya kwa kitambo. (kiu)
 When he took her, he threw her on the bed, and then **they made love** silently for a while.

Akamzungushia mikono na kumwambia maneno matamu ya mahaba na kumbusu bila woga tena. (kiu)
 He hugged her saying **sweet words of love** and kissing her without fear anymore.

Rosa alianza tena maisha ya mahaba. (ros)
 Rosa started again with her **life of love**.

Moreover, there are contexts where the term *mahaba* is not openly describing a physical love encounter; however, it refers to the strong passion and attraction between two lovers, who can verbally express their love, through *maneno* (words) and *sauti* (voice):

Nayo ni ile iliyojaribu kukurubuni wewe kwa maneno laini ya mahaba juzi usiku kule Kibiti. (sok)
 And that is what tried to cheat you with **tender words of love** last night there in Kibiti.

Aliposhindwa kustahimili na kujaribu kujitetea kwa vitendo alikuwa kisukumwa tena kulala chali huku sauti yenye mahaba ikimnong'oneza taratibu. (dsm)
 When she couldn't endure and tried to defend herself with actions, she was pushed again to lie on the back, while **a voice with love** was slowly whispering to her.

¹⁴ The Hindi word *muhabbat* (‘love’) is also an Arabic loanword from the same root, used both in spoken and written language (Dziekan 2009: 66).

‘LOVE’ ENCODING IN SWAHILI

Differently from the forms derived by the root *-pend-*, in religious contexts, it would be unrespectful to use the expression **mahaba ya Mungu* (the love of God) or **muhibu Mungu* (the beloved God), instead, *mapenzi ya Mungu* and *mpenzi/mpendwa Mungu* are preferred.¹⁵

However, it should be remarked that in Arabic the root *-ḥbb-* has a broader semantic context of use. In fact, it is actually used in religious contexts, referring to God: e.g. *ḥubb Allāh*, *al ‘azīz* (the one who is shining for love, i.e. God); *al-ḥubb al-ilāhi*, (divine love, i.e. the love based on the correspondence between the Creator and his creature) (Chebel 2007: 32).¹⁶

In a context of higher register, such as Swahili love poetry, *mahaba* refers to the passion that the poet feels towards his lady but it is also used as a self-standing noun, an addressing term for the ‘lover’, for instance, *mahaba nakwita* (my love, I call you), (Knappert 1972).

Huba (love), habibi (darling), mahabubu (beloved)

Apart from *mahaba*, another term for love, derived from the same root /ḥbb/ is *huba* (love). Both *huba*, and the corresponding addressing terms (*habibi* and *mahabubu*), do not occur often in prose, indeed in the corpus there are only 6 occurrences for *huba* and only one for *habibi*¹⁷ and *mahabubu*.

However, these terms are frequently used in poetry, as we can see from the examples below, where *huba* usually appears in its plural form (cl.10).

<i>hali yangu majiruhi</i>	I am sick and wounded
<i>kwa huba zilonifika</i>	with the feelings of love that assail me ¹⁸
<i>machizi ya huba</i>	Tears of love
<i>yamenidondoka</i>	trickle down my face ¹⁹

The addressing term *habibi* is commonly used both in Arabic and Swahili, even beyond lovers’ relationship context, for instance, among friends or between mother and child; moreover, its use is even common on the Internet in social networks’ speech²⁰.

Mahabubu, (and its Swahili variants *muhebi/muhabu*, *muhibu*) is often used in poetry with a possessive to address the lover (es. *muhibu wangu*, ‘my lover’). It has two Arabic correspondent

¹⁵ Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir, interview by author on 21st March 2015, Bayreuth.

¹⁶ The term *habibi*, used in Arabic as an addressing term for the lover and the beloved person in general, appears in the expressions *habibi Allah*, *muhib Allah*, *mahabub Allah*. The term *al-mahabba* (friendship-love) in Arabic is also referred to God, carrying the meaning of ‘the passion of the mystic who is addressing to God’, a concept related to the idea of purity (*safā*). (Chebel 2007: 63).

¹⁷ In Arabic, there are two different forms: *habibi* (m.) and *habibah* (f.); *Ya habibi* means ‘my tender friend’, ‘my sweet love’, (Chebel 2007:29).

¹⁸ Knappert 1972:128.

¹⁹ Knappert 1972:163.

²⁰ Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir, interview by author on 11th April 2015, Bayreuth.

forms *muhibb*, *muhibba* (f.), ‘the one who loves, the lover’ and *mahub*, ‘the beloved’, also used in the context of friendship.

The following verses, show that *muhibu/mahabubu* is used both as a self-standing noun, and with a possessive or with another noun, having the function of an adjective (e.g. *mpenzi muhibu*):

Njiwa peleka salamu
kwa yule wangu muhibu
tufaha langu muhibu
mpenzi muhibu
 [...] *sikiza muhibu*
 [...] *njoo mahabubu,*
hapa nakutaka
wangu mahabuba
ameshanitoka

little pigeon carry my greetings
 to that **beloved** of mine²¹
 my **darling** apple²²
 beloved **lover**
 listen my **lover**
 come, **beloved**
 I need you here²³
 my **beloved**
 has deserted me²⁴

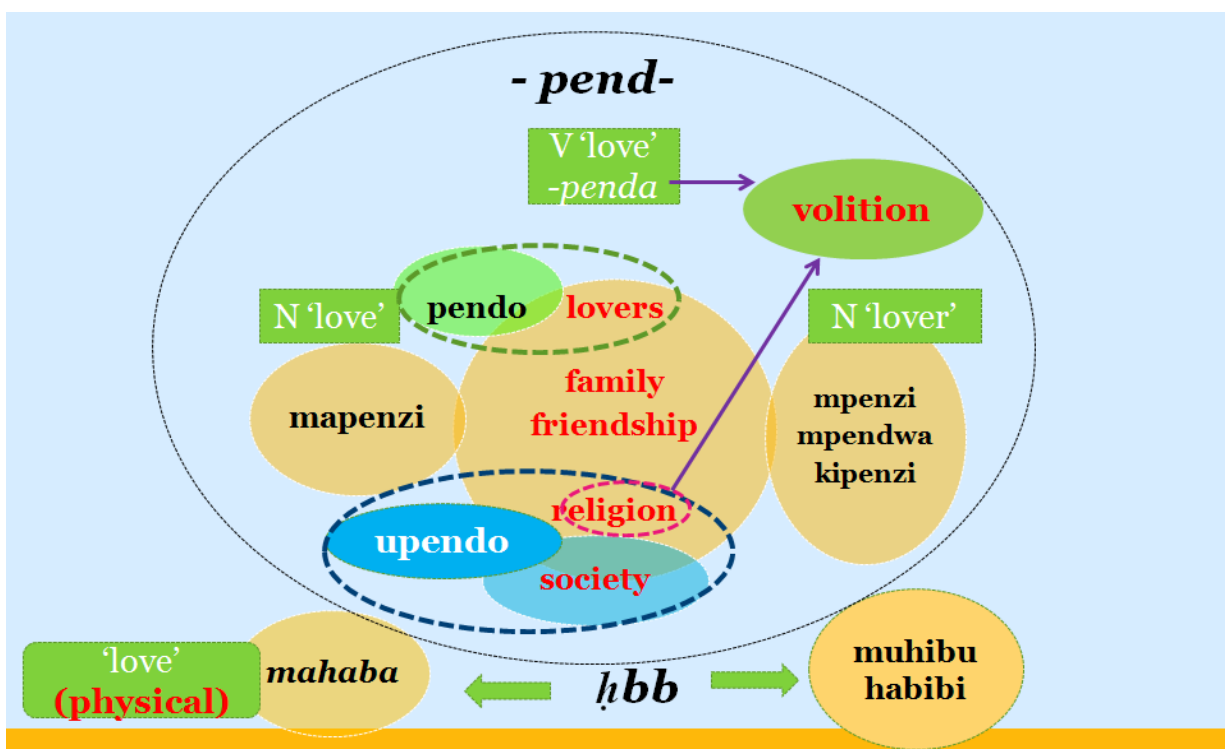


Figure 2 Swahili ‘love’ semantic map

²¹ Knappert 1972: 18.

²² *Ibd*: 50.

²³ *Ibd*: 82.

²⁴ *Ibd*: 163.

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Love in ‘poetic’ terms

I have labelled terms as ‘poetic’ those terms which mostly occur in poetry, and I have reported some examples from an extra-source, which is not part of the corpus, namely *An anthology of love Swahili love poetry* (Knappert 1972).

In fact, several nouns of the semantic domain of ‘love’ results to have very few occurrences in the corpus: *habibi, huba, mahabubu, muhibu*, (see 3.2), *azizi, halili* (no occurrences were found in the corpus for this term), *ashiki* and *nyonda*. All these terms are Arabic loanwords, except for *nyonda*. Apart from Kezilahabi’s works *Karibu Ndani* (1988) and *Kichomi* (1974), the corpus is mostly composed of works of Swahili contemporary prose (novels and short stories).

Halili, azizi

The terms *halili*, ‘beloved, respectable person’, and *laazizi (azizi)*²⁵, ‘the precious one’ (TUKI 2001: 97, 170), are used as addressing terms for the lover in several poems, whereas their occurrences in the corpus are really scarce, (none for *halili* and only two occurrences for *laazizi*):

Hapo labda ndipo miadi inapokuwa kitu azizi na kutarajiwa kuota imara kwenye rutuba ya mapenzi. (tum)

At this point is when the appointment becomes something **precious** and it is expected to grow robust in the fertility of love.

Pindi aingiapo nzi kwenye chakula

Kukitamani siwezi kitu kukila

Mwenye nafusi azizi hakiri dhila

Hakiri dhila, hakiri dhila (ute)

When the fly enters the food,

I cannot desire to eat anything,

who has a precious soul, doesn’t accept agony

doesn’t accept agony, doesn’t accept agony

In the *Anthology of Swahili love poetry* (Knappert 1972) there are examples of verses, in which *azizi* is used as an addressing term, sometimes as an attribute of *mpenzi*:

Mpenzi wangu azizi

natoa yangu kauli

uisikie azizi..

[...] yaniadhibu mapenzi

taabibu ndiwe *azizi*

mawazo mengi huwaza

nakuambia *azizi*

my precious darling²⁶

I am saying what I have to say

listen **my precious** one

love tortures me

you **my precious** one are my doctor²⁷

I have many thoughts

I am telling you **my precious** one²⁸

²⁵ *Laazizi* is also used in *luga ya mitaani* referred to a girlfriend (used in address; predominantly used with possessive) similar to *asali wa moyo, mwandani* (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006: 22).

²⁶ Knappert 1972: 28.

²⁷ *Ibd*: 52.

²⁸ *Ibd*: 29.

Nyonda, ashiki

Also the terms *nyonda* and *ashiki*, which are attested in some dictionaries as synonyms of *mapenzi* (Mohamed 2008: 177), also do not have many occurrences in the corpus; indeed the only single occurrence of the term *nyonda* that I have found in the corpus is contained in the poetic text, *Kichomi* (Kezilahabi 1974).

<i>Sura ya huyo mtoto</i>	The face of this child
<i>Daima ilimsaliti</i>	always betrayed him
<i>Ikamtesa rohani</i>	it tortured him in his soul
<i>Na nyonda kumwongezea.</i>	and increased the love in him.
<i>Mwishowe hili shauri kakata.</i>	He finally took this decision. (kicho)

It should be remarked that, in fact, these terms describe ‘love’ rather as ‘desire’ or ‘passion’ and are mostly used in poetry and in taarab love songs (Khamis 2004).

For instance, some taarab love songs’ lyrics by J. Bhalo, refer to love by the term *nyonda*, for instance:

<i>mwenye nyonda si mzima,</i>	who is in love is not healthy
<i>sife moyo nyonda wangu,</i>	don’t get discouraged, my love
<i>uzito wa nyonda,</i>	the difficulty of love

Both *ashiki* and *nyonda* can be used as a noun (referred to the beloved person, meaning ‘love’ or ‘lover, sweetheart, beloved’) or as a verb (indicating the emotional state). This is illustrated by the verses extracted from the poem below, titled “*nyonda*”.

<i>Za thakili nyonda</i>	Love that causes gloom
<i>Zilizoniswibu [...]</i>	that is what has crushed me [...]
<i>[...] nyonda ni nzito</i>	[...] love is heavy
<i>mno na adhabu</i>	too heavy, it is a punishment
<i>zishishile moto</i>	It burns,
<i>hazina tabibu</i>	there is no doctor for it.
<i>Pasina ufito</i>	There is no place where one can hide from it.
<i>nyonda nimetubu</i>	Love , I surrender. ²⁹
<i>[...] risala ya nyonda</i>	a message of love
<i>Kanipelekee</i>	take for me
<i>mwambie napenda</i>	tell her I love her
<i>huba zake yee</i>	my love is for her
<i>[...] mkalia ini</i>	whoever stays angry
<i>nyonda aso shaka</i>	is no doubt in love
<i>[...] nyonda siri hini</i>	this is the secret of love ,
<i>muhibu ridhika</i>	agree, darling ³⁰

²⁹ Knappert 1972: 141.

³⁰ Ibid: 147.

‘LOVE’ ENCODING IN SWAHILI

nyonda yuko mbali
nami nateseka

my **love** is far away
so I am suffering³¹

Other common poetic expressions containing the term *nyonda*, which are used to express the idea of ‘being in love with somebody’ are for instance:

nina nyonda moyoni

I have love in my heart

mimi nina nyonda ya/za mtu fulani

I am in love with somebody

nina nyonda zako

I am in love with you³²

Ashiki refers to ‘love’ as a more intense and elevated emotion than *mahaba*.³³ *Ashiki* is an Arabic loanword derived from the Arabic noun ‘*ishq* (desire)³⁴, from the verb ‘*ashaqa* (‘*shq*).³⁵ Similarly to *nyonda*, the term *ashiki* is used both as a noun and as a verb, expressing the idea of ‘having a passion for something, to be in love with’, (TUKI 2001: 14), not only restricted to the context of lovers’ relationship (e.g. *ashiki wa mpira*, ‘a fanatic of football’).

I found ten occurrences for this term in the corpus, in which *ashiki* mostly refers to sexual desire, mostly as a bodily feeling, like it is reported in these sentences:

Ghadhabu taghafali kwa ajili ya kucezewa huku na wasichana hawa duni pamoja na ashiki aliyokuwa nayo mwilini juu ya msichana Tulilumwi, vilichangamana akilini vikileta sumu kali ya chuki. (njo)

The unexpected anger for being mocked here by these mediocre girls together with the **desire** he had in his body for the girl Tulilumwi, were mixed together in his head and brought a strong poison of hate.

Vikaleta hamu na ashiki ya ajabu mwilini mwa Ndugu Lupituko; ashiki iliyomwondolea mawazo ikamwendesha kama mashine. (njo)

They [These things] generated **desire** and a weird passion in the body of Ndugu Lupituko; the desire that took away from him every thought, drew him like a mashine.

Common Swahili metaphors for love

Apart from the lexical analysis of ‘love encoding’, in this section of the paper I aim to highlight love’s conceptualisation in Swahili through the analysis of figurative language. In particular,

³¹ Ibid: 132.

³² Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir, interview by author on 21st March 2015, Bayreuth.

³³ In Arabic there is even a more elevated and intense state of ‘love’, *gharam* (term used in Arabic songs), the concept of love which makes the lover become mad, *maghrum* (used frequently as *hubb*), in Arabic is the lover that burns for the sufferance of the passion and is prisoner of this love (Chebel 2007: 80). In colloquial Swahili, the term *maghrumu* is used to refer to a mad person (*mtu mwenye kichaa*), without reference to ‘love’. (Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir, interview by author on 11th April 2015, Bayreuth).

³⁴ The Arabic term ‘*ishq* has numerous connotations: its semantic field extends from the desire of seeing again the beloved person to more licentious meanings (Chebel 2008: 46).

³⁵ The verb ‘*ashaqa*, means ‘to long for somebody, to be attached to somebody’ (Traini 2004: 930).

several questions are investigated: which are the semantic features/images related to ‘love’s description? Are there common conceptual metaphors used to express the idea of love in Swahili?

The study relates to the theory of conceptual metaphor as described by Lakoff and Johnson (Conceptual Metaphor Theory), (1980) and in particular to the love metaphors’ pattern as described by Kövecses (1986). Even though, the focus of this part of the paper is not a comparative analysis Swahili-English, it should be taken into account that both Lakoff and Kövecses’ models mostly have been developed on the base of English linguistic examples. Thus, metaphorical features will be first analysed language-internally in order to understand to what extent these associations comprise universal and cultural models.

The body as *locus* of ‘love’

A common conceptual metaphor for love is THE BODY (or body parts) AS A CONTAINER OF EMOTIONS, implying that love is contained in the body. Semantic analysis of Swahili embodied expressions have already shown that body parts and bodily fluids, (es. *moyo*, ‘heart’, *kichwa* ‘head’, *uso* ‘face’, *jicho* ‘eye’, and *jasho* ‘sweat’), are metaphorically used as source domain for more abstract concepts, such as character traits, feelings and emotional status (Kraska-Slenk 2014). A prominent example is *moyo*, that seems to have a wide spectrum of metaphorical connotations such as ‘courage, volition, self, love’ (Kraska-Szlenk 2014).

However, in Swahili, emotions are also located in the ‘liver’, *ini*, like in these idiomatic expressions:

*pendo lanikata ini*³⁶
ini langu hukatika
mpendi kukutamani

love is tearing me within³⁷
my inner core is continually torn
with longing for you, darling³⁸

The ‘eye’ (*jicho*) and the heart (*moyo*) are the means through which we are affected by love, as we see in the verses of the poem *Jicho na moyo* (Knappert 1972: 157):

Jicho ndilo la awali
mashaka kukuletea
moyo ukawa wa pili
matatani kukutia

The eye was the first
to give you trouble,
and the heart was the second
to entangle you.

³⁶ Liver.

³⁷ Knappert 1972: 158.

³⁸ Knappert 1972: 112.

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The image of love contained in lovers’ glance, frequently occurs in Swahili verses, but also in some expressions, where the eyes (*macho*) are seen as locus of love, for instance “*naenda kutia macho nuru*”³⁹ (lit. ‘I will go to put light into my eyes’, I will go to see **my lover**).

The power of love makes the lover become *chongo* that is ‘to see the world from the perspective of a one-eyed person’:

[...] *kipenda, chongo mwanadamu huona kengeza*. (dum)
[...] when one is in love, he is one-eyed with a squinting glance.

The typical image of the lover, mad for his/her partner, falling at her feet (*miguu*) and under her footprints (*nyayo*), is illustrated in these examples:

<i>salamu nakuleteya</i>	I send you greetings
<i>ni maguuni tahati</i>	and I am at your feet ,
<i>kwako nalembelekeya</i>	falling for you. ⁴⁰
<i>Niko chini ya nyayo zako</i> ⁴¹	‘I am under your footprint ’

Moreover, the body terms *moyo* (or *fuadi*), ‘heart’, *ini* ‘the liver’, *roho*, ‘soul’ *nafsi*, ‘self/person’, and *jicho* ‘eye’ metonymically represent the beloved person. Some common poetic expressions are, in fact, *roho yangu* (my soul), *jicho langu; kituzo cha jicho langu* (the precious of my eye), *chongo langu* (my one-eyed, my love), *kipande cha ini* (a piece of my liver).

The lover is also depicted metaphorically as an element of nature, such as birds⁴², plants or fruits. For instance, in the *Anthology of Swahili Love Poetry*, the poet frequently addresses to her lover by calling her *Njiwa* (little pigeon), *Zabibu* (grape), *Tufaha langu muhibu* (my beloved apple), *Waridi* (rose), *Ua langu* (my flower). These terms of address are also common in taarab songs’ lyrics (Khamis 2004).

Love is heat and cold

According to Lakoff (1980) and Kovecses’ (1982; 1986) model, one of the most relevant source domain for love conceptual metaphors is the idea of HOT and bodily warmth, implying the metonymical association PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR EMOTION.

Whereas the association heat (fire) – love, seems relevant in Swahili, however, also the idea of cold associated to love needs to be taken into account.

³⁹ Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir, interview by author on 28th March 2015, Bayreuth.

⁴⁰ Knappert 1972: 139.

⁴¹ Ustadh Ahmad Mahmoud Abdulkadir, interview by author on 28st March 2015, Bayreuth.

⁴² For instance, in the popular Swahili song “Malaika”, the lover is addressed as “kidege”.

Instead of heat and cold being two distinct metaphors of love, we could conceptualize them as if they constitute the two extremes of a more complex system of balance of fluids within the body. In fact, according to Swartz (1992: 47), the Swahili understands body's functioning as a result of the balance (*muutadil* or *mizani*) among four elements. These elements are called *matabia* ("elements" or "characters") (Swartz 1992: 41). Individually, they are called *hari* ('hot'), *baridi* ('cold'), *yabisi* ('dry'), and *rughtba* ('wet'), and each of them is associated to a specific body part and to a bodily fluid (Swartz 1992: 41). Even food and drinks are classified according to the humour that they promote (e.g. honey is said to be hot). In the Greco-Islamic scheme these are associated with the four elements of the universe: cold with air, hot with fire, dry with earth and wet with water (Swartz 1997: 98).

In Swahili language, love metaphors are associated both with the concepts of hot and cold relating to Swahili bodily functions.

The term *mapenzi* indeed occurs in several expressions, associated with nouns or verbs, which denote the idea of fire, flames and warmth; for instance, *moto*, 'fire', (*biwi la moto wa mapenzi*, 'heaps of fire of love'); *mwako*, 'heat, flame light' (*moyo una mwako*, 'my heart is burning'); *jua*, 'sun', (*jua la mapenzi*, 'the sun of love'); *kuungua*, 'to burn', (*Malungu alikuwa anaungua katika tanuu kali ya mapenzi*, 'Malungu was burning in the strong limes of love').

The fire reflects the idea of 'burning' passion of the lover, who wants to satisfy his desire to see her/his partner. According to the theory of bodily humours, the element of *hari* (hot) is centred in the liver and is associated with blood. Thus, the conceptual metaphor of fire is related to the idea of a hot fluid (blood) in a container, whose behaviour changes according to the level of the temperature. Thus, there is a wide scale of feelings which range from the highest temperature level, in which the strong love's desire is not satisfied yet, to the lowest level of temperature when the lover's desire has been satisfied so has cooled down love's burning flames. The idea of coolness (referring to sexual desire) in Swahili is indeed associated with the metaphor of 'cooling down', involving the semantic area of *baridi* 'cold' (*kupoa* 'to cool; to be quiet', *kupoza* 'to make cool; to calm'; *kuganda* 'to freeze'). Thus, the lover is often metaphorically addressed in poetry as *pozo la moyo*, ('the cooling' of my heart) or *tulizo la moyo*, (the consolation of my heart), (*barafu ya moyo*, lit. 'the ice of my heart', 'my lover').

rudi masikani
unituze moyo
Nililowaeleza
maneno jadidi
menigandamiza
katika fuadi

come back home
and give my heart **peace**⁴³
What I explained to you
are new words
rooted
in my heart⁴⁴

⁴³ Knappert 172: 132.

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The verb *kutulia* expresses the idea of ‘calming down’ (of the physical desire), which only the lover is able to cause. This idea is expressed in Swahili also by other emotional terms, such as *kuburudisha* ‘to refresh the mind, to chill out, to enjoy’ and *burudani* ‘entertainment’ (from the same lexical root of *baridi* ‘cold’), *kupona*: ‘to recover, to feel better (from *kupoa*⁴⁵: to cool down’). And examples of this kind are found also in prose:

Bahati alikuwa ametulia tuli, baridi kama aliyetolewa ndani ya barafu. (kiu)
Bahati was calm, cold like if she had been unfrozen.

Love is a fluid in a container

As it has been mentioned previously, in Swahili the target domain of emotions is very often understood in terms of the source domain of liquids (Olejarnik 2005: 189). There are indeed quite a number of love-expressions involving the idea of movement of a fluid, such as blood or water. For instance, ‘to fall in love’ or ‘to be in love’ is described by the image of falling into the water (es. *Nimezama katika bahari ya mapenzi*, lit. ‘I am immersed in the sea of love’, ‘I have fallen in love’; or *kujiopoa katika mapenzi*, lit. ‘to be drawn in love’). Love is described as a fluid to be poured in (*kumimina*) and which can also result in a change of state from solid to liquid, being melted (*kuyeyuka*) and dried, (*kukauka*).

The metaphor that best suits this linguistic feature is EMOTIONS ARE LIQUIDS WITHIN A PERSON (Olejarnik 2005: 191).

Wako katika mapenzi yaliyokauka ambayo bado yana harufu ya waridi la kale lisilosikia inzi wala nyuki bali vipepeo! (twe)
They are in a **dried love**, which has still the smell of an old rose that doesn’t perceive neither flies, nor bees but butterflies!

Bahati mbaya kuliko zote ni kuwa Aziza alishindwa kujiopoa katika mapenzi ya Fuad, kama Fuad alivyoshindwa kujiokoa asizame moja kwa moja katika mapenzi ya Adila. (nyo)
The worst thing was that Aziza couldn’t **draw herself out** of Fuad’s love, in the same way as Fuad couldn’t save himself from **sinking** directly in Adila’s love.

Hicho ndicho kiasi cha mapenzi aliyomminia nayo Farouk. (dum)
This was the great love that Farouk **had poured** into himself.

Sasa hitilafu iliyokuwapo baina yao ikayeyuka kwa joto la mapenzi na huruma, wakawa kitu kimoja. (kiu)
Now the discord between them **melted for the heat** of love and kindness, and they became a single entity.

⁴⁴ Knappert 1972: 110.

⁴⁵ In colloquial Swahili *poa*, meaning ‘I’m ok!’ is a typical answer to the informal greeting *mambo?* (how are things?).

ROSANNA TRAMUTOLI

Wazo la aina hiyo, pamoja na kisasi alichokuwa nacho juu yake vilikwishayeyuka kama barafu katika moyo wake. (dsm)

This kind of thought, together with the desire of revenge that she had on him **had already melted** like **ice** in her heart.

Sasa zile huruma alizokuwa akimwonea mama yake ziligeuka mvuke katika jua la mapenzi zikapotea. (kiu)

Now the compassion she had for her mother **became vapour** in the sun of love and they dissolved.

Love is illness

According to the metaphorical model, associating LOVE with INSANITY is a universal metaphor. In Swahili poetry, as well as in prose, ‘love’ is often described as an irrational force which can affect health both physically and mentally (*Pendo huwa ni maradhi*, ‘Love is illness’, Knappert 1972: 80), as it is shown by these expressions, in which it is described as an ‘illness’ lacking any rational control:

Sehemu kubwa ya mapenzi iko chini ya akili. (kima)

A great part of love has no rational control.

*mapenzi hayafuati akili sana
ghiliba za mapenzi
mapenzi ni upofu*

Love doesn’t really listen to mind (kima)

The deceptions of love (kiu)

Love is blindness (kiu)

The beloved person (*muhibu*) is the only doctor (*taabibu*) who is able to cure this illness, as he/she is the medicine (*dawa*) for his/her partner’s heart (*moyo*):

*dawa yangu ya moyoni
kuonana na muhibu
Pendo laniswibu
kwako nateseka
linaniadhibu
lanipa mashaka
wewe nde tabibu
moyo huridhika*

the **medicine** of my heart
is to see my **beloved** again⁴⁶
Love has struck me,
I suffer for you,
it tortures me,
it gives me anxiety,
you are the **doctor**,
my heart agrees with you⁴⁷

Universal metaphors of ‘love’ in Swahili

Comparing the metaphorical expressions referred to ‘love’ to the model described by Kövecses (1986), we can find several analogies. In this section, I will illustrate the most common universal ‘love’ metaphors, which occur in the corpus.

⁴⁶ Knappert 1972: 126.

⁴⁷ Knappert 1972: 82.

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Love is depicted as a PHYSICAL FORCE, often occurring as subject of the sentence, with anthropomorphic features, for instance:

Mapenzi hayaogopi hatari Love is not afraid of danger (duni)
Mapenzi huua mapenzi Love kills love (kar)

It is also conceptualized as a NATURAL FORCE, i.e. having those features, which are normally attributed to vegetables, for instance:

Mbegu ya mapenzi ilianza kuota mizizi katika mioyo yao. (dsm)
The seeds of love started to grow roots in their hearts.

Siku ambayo mapenzi yetu yalikatwa kwa nguvu yakingali mabichi? (ros)
The day when our love was cut with force while being still **unripe?**

This image of love as a force is emphasized by the metaphor LOVE IS WAR, i.e. ‘love’ is a force that fights against hate (*chuki*). The verbs *kushinda* ‘to succeed’, (also in its passive form *kushindwa* ‘to be defeated’), *kuanguka* ‘to fall down’, *kukanyagwa* ‘to be oppressed’, *kuzidi* ‘to overcome’ and the nouns *nguvu* ‘strength’, *mapenzi mazito* ‘strong love’, *mtego* ‘trap’, are normally used in the semantic domain of ‘conflict’, ‘fight’ and ‘war’.

Mapenzi yashinda chuki
Love **defeats** hate (kima)

Ushindi wa mapenzi ni kushindwa kwa chuki (kima)
The **success** of love is the defeat of hate

Popote penye mapenzi, chuki itaanguka (kima)
Wherever there is love, hate will **fall down**

Chuki itakanyagwa na mapenzi (kima)
Hate **will be overpowered** by love

Moreover, it is common to think of sexual desire in terms of a physical need that has to be satisfied, such as hunger or thirst. Also, in Swahili slang, (*lugha ya mitaani*), most of the expressions referred to sexuality include the verb *kula* (to eat).⁴⁸

In the examples below, extracted from the literary corpus, *mapenzi* is associated with *kiu* (thirst) and *tamaa* (desire), two terms, which refer both to sexual and food desire. Kövecses (1986: 67) indeed, describes the object of love as associated to the source domain of

⁴⁸ Food and eating are well known as metaphors for sexual relations. This accounts for phrases using *kula* ‘eat’ to express the activity of the male part in sexual intercourse. There are also terms denoting homosexual men as well as women, which are taken from the domain of food. The underlying common concept is that of consumption. Ex. *kula mande*, *kula uroda*, *kula mikasi* (to make sex); *kunawa* ‘to wash hands’, metaphorically means ‘petting’, based on the cultural script of washing hands as a prelude to eating, since eating metaphorically refers to sexual intercourse; *asali wa moyo* (honey of the heart) means ‘girlfriend’; nymphomaniac means *maharage ya Mbeya* (beans from Mbeya) (Reuster-Jahn & Kießling 2006)

APPETIZING FOOD. A common attribute for love in Swahili is *tamu* (with the corresponding noun *utamu*), which literally means ‘sweet’ and it is normally referring to an appetizing meal. The use of the verb *kumrambisha* (to make somebody lick) to refer to the target domain of emotions, is also metaphorical:

*Na ile dhiki ya kutupwa peke yake aishi milele katika **kiu** ya mapenzi.* (kiu)
And that distress of being left alone and live forever in **thirst** of love.

*Yale mapenzi, **ile tamaa**, yote yawe wameishia pale?* (kiu)
That love, **that desire**, they all ended there?

*Maneno **matamu** ya mahaba*
Sweet words of love (kiu)

***Utamu** wa mapenzi ya wazazi*
The sweetness of parents’ love (dum)

*Yeye Idi alikuja na **kumrambisha** mapenzi.* (kiu)
Idi came and **make her lick** the love.

However, love is not only depicted as a physical need, whereas it implies EFFORT and SACRIFICE from the people involved. This message is coded both in proverbs and figurative expressions, for instance, *mapenzi na starehe havipatikani kwa mikono mitupu* (see the English translation below). It is also entailed in the use of terms related to the idea of self-sacrifice, tolerance and respect of the other person, (es. *kuvumiliana*, ‘to tolerate each other’, *kutunza*, ‘to care’, *kujitolea* ‘to scarify him/her self’, *kukubali*, ‘to agree’, *mhanga*, ‘blood sacrifice’).

*Mapenzi ni **kuvumiliana** ili kutunza heshima na siri ya mwenzio.* (kima)
Love is **to tolerate each other** in order to take care of the respect and the secret of the other person.

*Mapenzi na starehe havipatikani **kwa mikono mitupu.*** (kiu)
Love and luxurious life cannot be found **without any effort**.

*Mapenzi ni **kujitolea na kukubali.*** (kiu)
Love is to **sacrifice yourself and to agree**.

***Mhanga** wa mapenzi*
The blood sacrifice of love (kiu)

In this last section, I have presented some examples, which show that there are some metaphorical schema on the concept of ‘love’, which can be universally applied to different languages such as Swahili and English. However, it should still be taken into account that all languages use specific strategies to describe abstract and complex concepts such as emotions. The specific cultural context in which they are conceptualized and described, must be considered.

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For instance, considering the Swahili bodily conception in relation to medical traditions will be a challenge for a deeper analysis of emotional metaphors.

Conclusions

This article has described the linguistic encoding of ‘love’ in Swahili, from a semantic and cognitive perspective, highlighting both the correspondences with the universal model and the cultural specific contexts of use. It has demonstrated that the use of love-related lexical items has semantic features that vary across different literary texts and according to the etymological analysis.

The comparison of lexical items, derived from the Bantu root *-pend-*, and those derived from the Arabic root *-ḥbb-*, shows that they encode different possible aspects of describing ‘love’ in Swahili. The Bantu root *-pend-*, (with its derived nouns *mapenzi*, *pendo*, *upendo*, ‘love’, *mpenzi* ‘lover’, etc.), represent several facets of love, involving different agents, not only lovers but also family, friends, God, society. The verb *kupenda* itself has a wide semantic spectrum of meanings, illustrating not only ‘romantic love’, but also the idea of liking something, or willing to do something, similar to *kutaka* (to want). On the other hand, the root *-ḥbb-* (and its derived terms *mahaba*, *huba*, *muhibu* etc.), in Swahili, has a more specialized context of use (see Figure 2). Differently from Arabic, where it has a wider semantic domain, the Swahili lexical items derived from the root *-ḥbb-*, are mostly used in those contexts describing physical love and related to the semantic field of sexuality.

In the second section of this paper, I have described ‘love’ from a cognitive linguistic perspective, comparing Swahili data to the universal conceptual categories offered by the models of Lakoff (1980) and Kövesces (1986). The use of love figurative language has shown that there are both universal and cultural specific conceptual means to encode ‘love’ in Swahili. For instance, the universal metaphorical concept of HEAT and INCREASE IN BODY TEMPERATURE (Kovecses 1986: 87), as a physiological effect of love, in Swahili, implies a correspondent concept of COLD, associated with ‘love’ as the satisfaction of the desire. The idea of COLD indicates a more general concept of ‘refreshing the mind, enjoying something and thus feeling satisfied and happy’.

Furthermore, the metaphor of the lover as a doctor who needs to cure the partner’s ILLNESS is a very prominent image in Swahili love poetry. On the other hand, I have shown that several Swahili conceptual metaphors related to ‘love’, are common cross-linguistically, like for instance, LOVE IS WAR; LOVE IS NATURAL AND PHYSICAL FORCE; LOVE IS SELF-SACRIFICE etc.

It should be remarked that there are also other dimensions of love, which are not related to the ‘language of emotions’, but rather to the encoding of ‘emotions’ as a wider concept. In fact, Santangelo (2009) highlighted that an emotion is not simply an abstraction of a complex process, as it appears from the lexicon used to refer to it in a specific language; instead, it is a phenomenon involving an individual “lived experience”, as well as a social dimension, in other words, it is a way of communication.

Thus, there are many different contexts of ‘love’ in Swahili that still need to be investigated and which go beyond the textual analysis, for instance: How is ‘love’ evaluated socially/morally? Are there specific cultural ‘indirect’ means to codify ‘love’ (such as gestures)?

The purpose of this study was to analyse conceptual love metaphors through Swahili literature. However, the analysis of love encoding in Swahili based on language data derived from other sources (in particular from natural speech) will be the subject of a forthcoming study. In fact, Swahili is particularly rich in terms of idiomatic expressions referring to ‘love’ also in everyday language, e.g. *-pata jiko* ‘to marry’ (of a man only, lit. ‘to get a kitchen’); *-piga kisi/-piga busu* ‘to kiss’ and proverbs (*Asili ya huba, mwanzowe ni jicho* ‘The beginning of love is the eye’). It will be interesting to see how conceptual schemas of ‘love’ are elaborated by Swahili speakers in natural speech and particularly in *lugha ya mitaani* (‘street language’).

Thus, the multi-dimensional nature of emotions constitutes the challenge in order to study them from different perspectives.

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Abbreviations - Swahili sources from the Corpus of the UNIOR

- adi Shaaban Robert, 1952. *Adili na nduguze*, London & New York: Macmillan Education Limited.
- dsm Mtobwa R. Ben, 1994. *Dar-es-Salaam usiku*, DSM. Heko Publishers.
- dum Mohammed Said Ahmed, 1980. *Dunia mti mkavu*, Longman, Nairobi.
- duni Kezilahabi Euphrase, 1975. *Dunia uwanja wa fujo*, E.A.L.B., DSM Nairobi.
- kar Mohammed Suleiman Mohammed, Karudi, 1970. *Mapenzi ni kikohozi*, Longman, Nairobi.
- kicho Kezilahabi Euphrase, 1974. *Kichomi*, Heinemann, Nairobi
- kima Kezilahabi Euphrase, 1974. *Kichwamaji*, DSM. E.A.P.H.
- kiu Mohammed Suleiman Mohammed, 1972. *Kiu*, E.A.P.H., DSM.
- kun Mulokozi na K.K. Kahigi Mung'ong'o C. G., 1979. *Kunga za ushairi na diwani yetu* DSM. T.P.H.
- njo Mulokozi na K.K. Kahigi Mung'ong'o C. G., 1980. *Njozi iliyopotea*, DSM:T.P.H.
- nyo Mohammed Suleiman Mohammed, 1976. *Nyota ya Rehema*, Nairobi: O.U.P.
- ros Kezilahabi Euphrase, 1971. *Rosa Mistika*, Nairobi : E.A.L.B.
- san Marzio Ciro (comp.), 1992. *Kigano cha nuru sanaa*.
- sok Chachage L., 2002. *Makuadi wa soko huria*, DSM: E & D Limited
- tum Mohammed Said Ahmed, 1985. *Tumba iliyovia, Si shetani si wazimu*, Zanzibar: Zanzibar Publ.,
- twe Macha, F., 1984. *Twenzetu Ulaya*. Tanzania: GAP
- ute Mohammed Said Ahmed, 1980. *Utengano*, Longman, Nairobi.
- uwa Rais Benjamin W. Mkapa, 2003. *Uwazi na Ukweli*, Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.

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