

Examiners' Report Summer 2007

O Level

O Level Swahili (7642)

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The paper was balanced and well received; its structure and organisation enabled the emergence of differentiation in the performance of the candidates, most of whom have performed better this year. Weak points were class agreements and minor grammatical errors; some students also had problems with basic use of different tenses.

Question 1

The passage is a report of a meeting of the local City Council which discussed the shortage of residential homes in large cities. The passage also discussed the plight of villagers who come to the cities in search of a better life but get caught in homelessness. The vocabulary reflected words of daily usage as well as words which students are expected to know from their own environment. Most candidates did well on this passage, but the following were occasionally mistranslated:

- halmashauri: Council
- jiji: city; some mistook this for 'village', 'kijiji'.
It is recommended that teachers should revise the formation of the diminutive in Swahili with examples such as *mtoto/kitoto*, *sanduku/kisanduku*, etc
- upungufu: shortage
- ujenzi: (the) building (of)
- kodi: rent
- panga: to rent. This was most commonly misunderstood as 'to plan', which is its alternative meaning

Grammatical problems: common errors were not being able to translate or understand 'hukodi' properly, i.e. the habitual tense 'hu-' (which, incidentally, also features in Q3(c)). It is recommended that teachers should revise this tense in particular, and the formation of tenses in general.

Translating the following phrase was sometimes found challenging because of its tenses: 'nyumba ile itakuwa imenunuliwa': 'that house will have been bought'.

Question 2

Candidates usually find translating a passage into Swahili a slightly more difficult exercise than translating it into English. This passage dealt with marriage and its place in culture. Some candidates found the following words/phrases difficult to translate into Swahili. (Alternative translations to the ones given here were also accepted where the meaning was retained)

- culture: utamaduni. Some students translated this as 'watu' or 'lugha'.
- 'music', 'dance' and 'songs' were found to be challenging.

The following phrases were found difficult to translate by some students:

- 'wishing them luck for the future'
- 'only daughter in the family'
- 'rented property'

It is recommended that:

- (a) teachers should revise vocabulary dealing with cultural aspects in general
- (b) students should be made to practise translation exercises in class from English passages in newspapers, textbooks and past papers

Question 3

The sentences test knowledge of the candidates over a wide range of grammar and syntax. It is recommended that teachers should get their students to be familiar with at least the categories of grammar reflected in the questions. The following comments indicate the nature of the difficulty experienced by students; numbers (1) to (5) refer to the sentences in Q3 of the examination paper.

- (1) The use of the passive:
'We are pleased with our new house; it has five rooms'.
The phrase 'we are pleased (with)' was problematic for some. In Swahili this is rendered by a form of the passive verb: 'tumefurahishwa (na)....' The agreement for 'five rooms': *vyumba vitano*, was also often not correct.
- (2) The use of 'natumai kwamba...'
'I hope that he will pass his examinations': *Natumai kwamba atafaulu/atapita*. The use of 'nafikiri' for 'I hope' is not acceptable.
- (3) The use of the habitual tense: *hu-*, denoting action done as a habit, or regularly:
'My brother always goes for a swim on Saturday mornings'
The construction did not prove difficult for candidates as such, but there was confusion between 'oga' (to bathe) and 'ogelea' (to swim).
- (4) The use of the interrogative, negative:
'Why did they not run to the car when the fire started?'

Although the grammatical aspect of the negative construction did not pose a problem, only a few students got the nuances correct between 'kimbia' (to run) and 'kimbililia' (to run to): *Kwa nini hawakuikimbililia gari...?*
- (5) The use of the conditional; both clauses are in the negative:
'If you do not think that I should buy that shirt, I won't.'
A similar construction was given in last year's paper. It is interesting to note that candidates have repeated the same errors. A better way of translating the first negative is through the use of *hu...* in - 'kama hufikiri' , 'if you do not think that'.
Some candidates - though fewer than last year - have translated, 'I won't' by 'sita' as a word on its own. This is not acceptable, as the full word, 'sitanunua' should be written.

Question 4

Candidates were required in this question to write an essay of up to 250 words on one of four given topics. The four topics this year were:

- a) Imagine that you had to go by dhow from the coast of East Africa to either India or Arabia. Describe your journey and the challenges you faced.
- b) "The internet is an essential tool of life today." Do you agree? Why?
- c) Describe a hobby of your friend which you also share.
- d) You found an important document on a bus which has the address of its owner on it. Write a letter to her informing her of your find. Describe the document and give her directions where she might meet you.

Generally the essays were quite good, mostly of a higher quality than last year. Quite a few students did not read the question properly, for example talking about their plane trip to India in question (a) despite specifically being asked to describe a dhow trip. However, the standard of vocabulary and grammar was good. Teachers, though, should advise students not to overburden their essays with proverbs, some of which are worked into the text rather artificially! Other points to watch out for were weaker class agreements and minor grammatical errors, and sometimes problems with basic use of different tenses.

A particular point for teachers to advise their students is related to the length of the essay. Although the rubric says 'up to 250 words', the essay should be of reasonable length to allow for its body to develop appropriately. It was interesting to note that essays on question (d) were often much shorter, perhaps because students felt that they did not have to write so much for a letter. The responses to this question were often more limited and less creative or expansive than the responses to questions (a), (b) and (c).

Statistics

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Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Lowest mark for award of grade	66	56	47	42	37

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