Huru na Bure: Swahili Collaboration and the Future of African Languages on the Web

Martin Benjamin
Yale Council on African Studies
Huru na Bure: Swahili Collaboration and the Future of African Languages on the Web

• Kamusi Project Description
• The Editorial Oversight Model
• Open Knowledge Projects in the Contemporary African Context
Kamusi Project Description

1. Project History
2. Visitor Stats
3. Technical Overview
Project History

• Began in late 1994 (using Gopher and a listserve)
• First 56,000+ terms entered into Excel spreadsheet and uploaded to the web periodically (users sent submissions via email)
• Launched Edit Engine in 2000
• Introduced Grouping Tool in 2005
• Developing online Learning Center
Swahili Overview:

- 100 million speakers
- About 1.5% of world’s people
- Most widely spoken African language
- Much larger than many European languages with massive Wikipedias
- Language of media, commerce, government, education
Visitor Stats

- 6,000,000+ lookups per year
- Tens of thousands of unique visits per month
- Millions of university uses worldwide
- Used by governments, businesses, churches, zoos…
- Frequent use in Africa
- Numerous high-ranked Google results (try “extra-large buttocks” or “sexual intercourse photos” 😊)
- Probably the most widely used African language resource on the Internet
Technical Overview

Major features include:

- Edit Engine
- Grouping Tool
- Photo Uploader
- Search Engine and Downloadable Dictionaries
- Terminologies and Dialects
- Discussion Forum
- Learning Center
Edit Engine Participants

Editorial Content (Number of submissions noted):

- Martin Benjamin - 1400
- Sean O'Rourke - 492
- Christiaan Kooyman - 190
- Andrew Clark - 121
- Paul Shannon - 81
- David Simonds - 57
- Peter Schotsman - 56
- Heidi Glaesel Frontani - 54
- Katrina Daly Thompson - 27
- Challa Wright - 27
- Birgit Bauridi - 26
- Sonia Silbert - 25
- Desmond Serrette - 24
- Karisa Butler-Wall - 24
- Thomas J Hinnebusch - 22
- Hassani Saidi - 20
- Jacob Knight - 19
- Ian Eagleson - 17
- Carl Cervone - 16
- Joram Mwangi - 14
- Chris Chandler - 14
- Ann Biersteker - 14
- Danielle Heard - 13
- Joe Rodrigue - 12
- Jeremy Krieg - 10
- Susanna Nordlund - 7
- Linda Lonnqvist - 7
- Andrew Smith - 7
- Arielle Levine - 5
- Chumvi Mtambezi - 4
- Ben Stanford - 3
- Christa Runge - 3
- Konrad Ziegler - 3
Search Results for 'tafuta'

- **tafuta** { English: discover }  
  verb, [- [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]]

- **tafuta** { English: find }  
  verb, [- [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]]

- **tafuta** { English: hunt for }  
  verb, [- [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]]

  tafuta vitu : hunt for things

- **tafuta** { English: look for }  
  verb, [- [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]]

- **tafuta** { English: search }  
  verb, [- [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]]

- **tafuta** { English: seek }  
  verb, [- [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]]

A sample search result
Swahili-English dictionary entries for “tafuta” | Maingizo ya “tafuta” kweneke Kamusi Hai

To edit specific entries, mark them at left; otherwise all rows will be edited.

Kuhariri ingizo utakalo, wekea alama kushotoni; vinginevyo utaonyeshwa mistari yote kubadila.

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<th>Class</th>
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<th>Swahili Example</th>
<th>English Example</th>
<th>Derived</th>
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Edit | Hariri | Reset | Rudia
Adding Data

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- **Key:**
  - Modified: should be fixed
  - Must be fixed: must be fixed
  - Should be fixed: should be fixed
  - Non-applicable or deleted: non-applicable or deleted
  - Changed: changed

- **Note:**
  - Yumo dukani kukiKidu::tafuta</b>
Verifying Changes

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Additional blank rows: Mistari ya ziada iliyo wazi: 0

Proofread | Pitia kwa makini >>>
Confirm Swahili-English dictionary updates for "tafuta"
Thibitisha marekebisho ya "tafuta" kwenye Kamusi ya Kiswahili-Kiingereza

The following rows will be updated or deleted | Mistari ifuatayo itarekebishwa au kufutwa:

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Please check that this is correct | Tafadhali angalia kama hii iko sawa

Please send me confirmation when my updates are incorporated into the dictionary

Tafadhali nitumie ujumbe wa utibitisho wakati marekebisho nilyoofanya yatajumuishwa kwenye Kamusi Hai

Submit changes | Tuma mabadliko
Search Results for ‘tafuta’ | Matokeo ya Utafutaji kwa ‘tafuta’

The results for ‘tafuta’ are displayed below in alphabetical order, so please do not assume that the first entry you see is the best result. If you have a good working knowledge of both Swahili and English, please use our simple Grouping Tool to better arrange these results.

Matokeo kwa ‘tafuta’ yaonyeshwa kwa taratibu ya alfabeti. Kwa hivyo, ushindi kwamba mwingilio wa kwanza ni tokeo linalozidi yote. Wewe ukielewa Kiswahili na Kinyarwanda, twaomba utumiego Zana Jumishi yetu ili kubaresha orodha ya matokeo haya. Ni rahisi, na utasaidia wasomaji wote wanaokufuata!

-tafuta { English: discover }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

-tafuta { English: find }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

-tafuta { English: hunt for }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]
 tafuta vitu : hunt for things

-tafuta { English: look for }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

-tafuta { English: search }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

-tafuta { English: seek }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]
 Yumo dukani kutilafuta dawa analotaka. : He is in the store to seek the medicine that he wants.

-tafuta { English: obtain }
verb , [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]
The Grouping Tool

Grouping Tool Instructions

This tool allows you to Group and Rank entries. When you "Group" entries, you are putting together entries that have a similar sense. When you "Rank" entries, you are showing which entries are more important or more relevant.

Maelezo ya Zana Jumuishi

Zana hii inakuwezesha kuweka miingilio kwa Kijumia na Umuhimu. Katika "Kijumia" utaweke miingilio yote yenye undani sawa. Katika "Umuhimu" utoaneyesha kuna miingilio gani muhimu au inayotumika zaidi. Kama una...
KAMUSI GROUPING TOOL | ZANA JUMUISHI KUORODHESHA KAMUSI

Translate
tafuta

- English - Swahili
  - Swahili - English

Look Up

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AFRICA GUIDE

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Yale Program in
African Languages
Yale University
New Haven, CT
06520-8206 USA

Grouping Tool Instructions
This tool allows you to Group and Rank entries. When you "Group" entries, you are putting together entries that have a similar sense. When you "Rank" entries, you are showing which entries are more important or more common. The tool provides options to add breaks to the list and to move up or down in the list.

Maelezo ya Zana Jumuishi
Search Results for 'tafuta' | Matokeo ya Utafutaji kwa 'tafuta'

The results for 'tafuta' are displayed below as they have been grouped and ranked by a Kamusi Project participant. If you have a good working knowledge of both Swahili and English and wish to make further changes to the way these results are arranged, please use our simple Grouping Tool.

Matokeo kwa 'tafuta' yaonyeshwa kama waliorodheshwa na mshiriki wa Kamusi Hai. Wewe ukelewa Kiswahili na Kigereza na ukitaka kufanya mabadilisho mengine kwenye orodha, twaomba utumie Zana Jumuishi yetu - ni rahisi kutumia, na utasaidia wasomaji wote wanaokufuata!

- tafuta { English: search }
  verb , [- edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

- tafuta { English: look for }
  verb , [- edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

  Yumo dukani kutafuta dawa analotaka. : He is in the store to seek the medicine that he wants.

- tafuta { English: hunt for }
  verb , [- edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

  tafuta vitu : hunt for things

- tafuta { English: find }
  verb , [- edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

- tafuta { English: discover }
  verb , [- edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]

- tafuta { English: obtain }
  verb , [- edit entry ] [ photos: upload ]
Search Results for 'goshawk'

Gabar goshawk (Micronisus gabar), pl Gabar goshawks { Swahili: kizu miguu-myekundu , (pl kizu miguu-myekundu) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [edit entry] [photos: upload / view]

pale chanting goshawk (Melierax poliopterus), pl pale chanting goshawks { Swahili: kizu domo-njano , (pl kizu domo-njano) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [edit entry] [photos: upload / view]

dark chanting goshawk (Melierax metabates), pl dark chanting goshawks { Swahili: kizu domo-jekundu , (pl kizu domo-jekundu) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

3 distinct results returned.

Would you like to modify this search?

- Search for entries beginning with "goshawk"
- Search for entries containing "goshawk" (SLOW)
- Search the Swahili-English dictionary for "goshawk"
The Internet Living Swahili Dictionary

Welcome to the Internet Living Swahili Dictionary

Illustrative images for
pale chanting goshawk (Melierax poliopterus), pl pale chanting goshawks { Swahili: kizu domo-njano, (pl/ kizu domo-njano) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [ edit entry ] [ photos: upload / view ]

Mpigapicha: Christiaan Kooyman
Mahali: Tsavo West National Park, Kenya
Tarehe: 1/4/2005
SPECIALIZED VOCABULARIES

Dialect

- Kimvita - English - Swahili
- Sheng - English - Swahili
- archaic - English - Swahili
- colloquial - English - Swahili
- dialectical - English - Swahili
- obsolete - English - Swahili
- recent - English - Swahili

Terminology

- Christian - English - Swahili
- IT-klnX - English - Swahili
- Islamic - English - Swahili
- agriculture - English - Swahili
- anatomy - English - Swahili
- anthropology - English - Swahili
- astronomy - English - Swahili
- aviation - English - Swahili
- biology - English - Swahili
- botany - English - Swahili
- chemistry - English - Swahili
- culinary - English - Swahili
- economics - English - Swahili
- electricity - English - Swahili
- finance - English - Swahili
- geography - English - Swahili
- grammar - English - Swahili
- historical - English - Swahili
- legal - English - Swahili
SPECIALIZED VOCABULARY

Specialized English Vocabulary Results for Terminology 'ornithology'

(Black-backed) Puffback (shrike) (Dryoscopus cubla), pl puffbacks { Swahili: kipwe, (pl vipwe) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 7/8an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

Abdím's stork (Ciconia abdimii), pl Abdím's storks { Swahili: korongo samawati, (pl makorongo samawati) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 1/2 - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

African black duck (Anas sparsa), pl African black ducks { Swahili: bata mweusi, (pl mabata weusi) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 5/6an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

African crake (Crex egregia), pl African crakes { Swahili: kiluwiri wa Afrika, (pl viluwiri wa Afrika) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 7/8an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

African cuckoo (Cuculus gularis), pl African cuckoos { Swahili: keko kijivu, (pl keko kijivu) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

African darter (Anhinga rufa), pl darters { Swahili: mbizi, (pl mbizi) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

African fish eagle (Haliaeetus vocifer), pl African fish eagles { Swahili: kwazi, (pl kwazi) } [Terminology: ornithology]
noun 9/10an - [edit entry] [photos: upload]

African golden oriole (Oriolus auratus and O. oriolus), pl golden orioles { Swahili: mramba mweupe, (pl mramba weupe) } [Terminology: ornithology]
Running through *Objects*

Front - Card 1 of 2

| < First | < Nyuma | Geuza | Mbele > | Last > |

| < First | < Nyuma | Geuza | Mbele > | Last > |

Utanipa nini? *(Jibu: zawadi)*

Nita [pa zawadi.](#)

[Run through a different F.i.t.B set]

The Learning Center
Running through Objects

Front - Card 1 of 20

Kiingereza

Kiswahili

| < First | < Nyuma | Geuza | Mbele | Last |}

angalia jibu : kidokezo

[Run through a different TypeCheck set]
The Editorial Oversight Model

- Advantages and Disadvantages
- Comparison to the Grouping Tool
- Comparison to Wiki Model
Editorial Oversight: Advantages

• Maintaining Consistency
• Maintaining Quality
• Maintaining Decorum
• Maintaining Vision
Maintaining Consistency

Each submission gets polished for format issues
• working hyperlinks
• data in correct fields
• cross references
• etc…
Maintaining Quality

• Questionable submissions can be checked against a variety of sources, including discussion among scholars, *before* being presented to the public.

• User submissions trigger thorough editorial review of an entry, including the addition of derivational, usage, and other data.
Maintaining Decorum

• Attempts at vandalism or indecency never see the light of day
• Would-be vandals rarely bother, because their efforts die at the editor’s desk
Maintaining Vision

- No revert wars
- No deletions of terms because a term in use is “not proper Swahili”
- No inclusion of vanity neologisms that are not in actual use
Disadvantages of Editorial Oversight

- Users do not have the satisfaction of seeing their changes “go live” immediately
- Submissions create mandatory work for the editor or editors
- Eager contributors can overwhelm the system
- Users might feel inhibited by “big brother”
Comparison to the Grouping Tool

- Grouping Tool changes go live immediately
- Editor reviews changes when convenient, and can approve/revert/make more changes
- Little room for mischief
- Grouping Tool is a much less popular feature than Edit Engine
Comparison to the Wiki Model

• Wikipedia is a police state
  (“in which a sophisticated security apparatus monitors the population constantly for threats, and individual rights and freedoms are curtailed. It is indeed possible to be both a functioning democracy and a police state” – from Salon, 23 June 2006: http://wapurl.co.uk/?IDIKG5P)

• Thousands of editors act as enforcers

• Wikipedia succeeds because of the Watchlist feature

• Kamusi plans to add Watchlists to dictionary entries, and to Wikify explanatory lessons in the Learning Center
Open Knowledge Projects in the Contemporary African Context

- Accessibility of IT in Africa
- Relevance to African Audiences
- Training and Experience
- Funding
Accessibility of IT in Africa

Current Infrastructure

• Urban: Internet cafes and schools with unreliable connections
• Home computers/internet limited to wealthy enclaves
• Rural residents and urban poor have little or no access
• Much more hardware and connectivity than 10 years ago

Projections for next 10 years

• Efforts underway to get computers into many more schools
• “$100 laptop” may increase home computing, though still prohibitive for the $1/day majority
• Cellular technology is becoming ubiquitous
• New optical fiber links to north are currently being laid

Without access, participation is impossible
Relevance to African Audiences

People will not adopt IT without:
• Localized software
• Locally relevant content (in local and international languages)

People will not participate in Open Knowledge projects unless:
• A critical mass of relevant content is already available
• They see a substantial likelihood that their efforts will bear fruit within a reasonable period
Training and Experience

• The great majority of potential contributors in Africa have learned their computer skills in recent years, or have not yet had the opportunity.
• For most people (worldwide), “computer skills” only means the ability to word process, send emails, and fill in web forms.
• Open Knowledge projects must cater to a basic skill set (the current incarnation of MediaWiki fails miserably!)
• Hands-on training
Funding (or lack thereof)

• African economies are marked by people needing to pay attention to making a living
• IT access usually costs individuals $-£-€-¥
• Even busy professionals with good IT skills and access often need financial incentives
• Volunteering is a luxury
• African funders have other priorities (HIV, Darfur, clean water…)
• Overall funding for Africa is paltry
• But, Open Knowledge initiatives can contribute greatly to the infrastructure that will build the African economies of the future
The Future of African Languages on the Web

- Software infrastructure is mostly in place for Swahili (Kamusi is ready/ MediaWiki needs to be made user-friendly and localized)
- Other major African languages are lagging
- Hundreds of smaller languages have zero web presence
- Do we, as the technical developers of collaborative open knowledge initiatives, support:
  A. Darwinian “sink or swim”?
  B. Engaging the financial resources to really build tools for speakers of languages spoken in the world’s poorest places?
Free means:
• Open
• No cost to the user
Free does not mean
• No cost to produce
Huru na Bure: Swahili Collaboration and the Future of African Languages on the Web

Martin Benjamin
Yale Council on African Studies