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Author(s): Carol M. Eastman and Yahya Ali Omar

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# SWAHILI GESTURES: COMMENTS (*VIELEZI*) AND EXCLAMATIONS (*VIINGIZI*)

By CAROL M. EASTMAN and YAHYA ALI OMAR

## *Introduction*

In this paper a number of gestures used by Kenya coastal Swahili speakers is described. We describe gestures that are associated with speech in various ways ranging from some requiring speech as they are performed to others referred to *via* verbs or phrases which are performed non-verbally. We attempt to place the verbal-dependent gestures on a continuum of verbal—non-verbal communication. We also describe verbally-independent gestures and gesturally independent speech forms that function similarly in discourse.

This research is an outgrowth of an earlier paper by Eastman (1983) describing exclamations in (Standard) Swahili as verbal gestures, i.e. spoken forms functioning entirely in context and in relation to the behaviour in that context. Here we seek to broaden the scope of the pragmatic word class to which exclamations (*viingizi*) belong to include gestures *per se*. We also delimit another pragmatic 'word' class comprised of gestures. This other pragmatic 'Part of Speech' or, more aptly, 'Part of Communication' may be referred to as a set of *vielezi*—comments. We distinguish the function of verbal and gestural exclamations (*viingizi*) as being to evoke behaviour in context while the verbal and gestural behaviours classified as *vielezi* or 'comments' remark on behaviour that has already gone on in the context of discourse.

In spring 1983 at the University of Washington we collaborated on the preparation of a video programme to aid in Swahili language-class instruction.<sup>1</sup> In the process of working on this programme, we found that we were giving names to some of the gestures being illustrated and using whole sentences to represent others. Thus, during 'takes' when a gesture was required we would make reference to it verbally. Sometimes we would refer to it by the verbal expression used to accompany it (e.g. *ng'o ng'o*). Otherwise we would use a verb referring to the action of the gesture (e.g. *kuramba kishogo* 'to lick the back of someone's neck') or a phrase or sentence indicating what the gesture means (e.g. *kidevu cha mtume* 'the prophet's beard').

In what follows, we provide some background information about gestures in general in Swahili. Next we describe the specific gestures independent of speech, requiring speech, or substituting for strings of spoken forms, respectively. By way of conclusion we summarize what we found to be the function of these pragmatic context-sensitive 'Parts of Communication' making some attempt to relate the gestural aspect of Swahili to the study of language use in context.

## *Background*

The Swahili–Swahili dictionary recently published for Standard Swahili in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (the *Kamusi ya KiSwahili Sanifu*, Oxford University Press, 1981) marks a number of entries, *kl.* for *kielezi* (pl. *vielezi*) referring to a 'word which explains the condition of some thing or matter (i.e. *kitu au*

<sup>1</sup> Sh. Yahya Ali Omar's visit was made possible by a grant from the University of Washington Graduate School Research Fund for which we are grateful. The instructional video programme we put together is entitled 'Swahili gestures' and is available for purchase through the University of Washington's Jackson School of International Studies *African Encounters* Film Series, K. Morell, Producer, Seattle, WA 98195, USA.

*jambo*)' (translation by C.E.). Thus, *asili* or *asilani* is listed as meaning 'to emphasize refusal'. It is used to mean that the speaker does not want to comply with a request and may be accompanied by a shaking of the head from side to side. *Asteaste* meaning 'carefully or slowly' is used to illustrate how what the speaker is saying is done, e.g. *Walitembea mbele asteaste* 'They walked ahead slowly'. While saying *asteaste* the speaker may move the index and middle fingers of the right hand (palm facing down) in a back and forth slow motion. Our focus in these pages is not on all forms classified as *vielezi* but more specifically on those that obligatorily require gestures to be understood appropriately. Neither *asili/asilani* or *asteaste* 'count' in this regard since the gestures that accompany their spoken form are automatic and optional. They are illustrators; gestures that a performer does not recall performing which serve to illustrate speech. They are not required in order for the spoken form to be interpreted.<sup>2</sup>

We hope to show that whereas exclamations are verbal/audible gestures, *vielezi*, as comments, when linked to gesture are gestural/visible speech. Some homophonous speech forms, in fact, may function both as *kiingizi* (exclamation) and *kielezi* (comment) with their difference in meaning a reflection of their functional difference. E.g.

*amba!* (*ki.*) exclamation of agreement 'yes, exactly!'

*amba* (*kl.*) comment 'perhaps, — so you say, but . . .'

*salala!* (*ki.*) exclamation of surprise 'Wow!'

*salala* (*kl.*) comment that something is more than surprising, it is impossible.

In just the first 20 pages of the *Kamusi ya KiSwahili Sanifu*, over 20 entries are classified as *kl.* (*kielezi*). The forms so labelled cover a wide range of usual language functions when translated into English. Represented particularly are adverbs, greetings, and prepositions, which share a common function of expressing a context-bound comment. Table 1 lists those *vielezi* and their English equivalents. None are listed in the dictionary as requiring gestures when they are used even though we 'know' we should, for example, wiggle the hands together with *alhasili* to illustrate the idea of many things mixed together, shake the hand at the wrist with *alaa*, and roll the eyes while saying *bilashi*. The forms listed as *vielezi* but necessarily followed by *ya* 'of' are equivalent to prepositions in English and have relatively less association with gesture (perhaps because of a stronger purely grammatical rather than pragmatic function?). That is, *badala ya* and *baada ya* are not as likely to be illustrated in speech while *baidi* 'far, distant', requiring no following particle is commonly accompanied by moving the head to indicate distance in time, space, or relationship.

All *vielezi* and *viingizi* in Swahili may be classified as particles in the sense of Jespersen (1924: 87): they are invariable in form and may (except for the *vielezi* that require a following *ya*, i.e. the 'pure' prepositions) stand alone and function as complete utterances.

Where certain *vielezi* may be accompanied by gestures used to illustrate the comment they make (as we have seen to be the case with some of those in Table 1), others go with gestures in such a way that the two form a unitary expression meaningless apart. The opening of a fist when one says *bayana* is a gesture that behaves like *asili*, *asilani* and the others discussed so far—it illustrates the idea expressed by *bayana* 'openly'. In addition to such illustrators, are gestures that one can recall and that substitute for verbal statements,

<sup>2</sup> For the various distinctions made among different types of gestures by scholars of non-verbal communication, see e.g. Morris, *et al.*, 1981; Ekman and Friesen, 1969.

<i>Kielezi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Kielezi</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
<i>afadhali</i>	it is best	<i>asilani (asili)</i>	to emphasize refusal
<i>aghalabu</i>	usually	<i>asteaste</i>	carefully, slowly
<i>ajibu</i>	precisely (cf. <i>barabara</i> )	<i>asubuhi</i>	morning—used as a greeting
<i>ajmaina</i>	(poetic) everyone	<i>baada ya</i>	after
<i>akali</i>	a small amount	<i>baadaye</i>	afterwards
<i>alaa</i>	any way at all	<i>badala ya</i>	instead of
<i>Allah Allah</i>	without fail (used to persuade someone)	<i>bado</i>	still
<i>alhasili</i>	many things together	<i>baghairi</i>	without
<i>alimradi</i>	used in various sayings to mean in order to, but, it is best, even, etc.	<i>baidi</i>	far, distant
		<i>bayana</i>	openly
<i>amba</i>	perhaps, e.g., after someone says 'I'll come tomorrow'	<i>belele</i>	a whole lot, very many
		<i>bidhori</i>	obligatorily, strongly
		<i>bilashi</i>	for nothing; without reason, profit

TABLE 1

and that are symbolic in their own right. These are emblems (cf. Ekman and Friesen, 1969)—gesture only or gesture plus speech forms learned in conjunction with a specific culture and acquired much as other forms of language are. The forms in Table 1 are all purely speech (linguistic) forms and hence not emblematic (associated with gesture) even if they may be accompanied by illustrators. Still, as we shall see below, *vielezi* may be both linguistic and emblematic and as such comprise a pragmatic Part of Communication uniting the verbal and non-verbal realms.<sup>3</sup>

In our research we uncovered a number of non-verbal symbolic emblems used by Swahili speakers. Claessen (1982) also noted many of these and in the next section we provide a description of those as an indication of the range of verbally independent gestures used in coastal Swahili society. Later we will discuss the culturally specific gestures as forming a possible extension of the class of exclamation (*vingizi*) in Swahili to the non-verbal realm.

#### *Verbal independent gestures in Swahili*

In this category fall a number of gestures that may be referred to by verbs, i.e. the activity they represent may be referred to in conversation though the gesture itself is non-verbal. These verbs 'meaning' gesture include, e.g.

*ku-suta* 'to make charges openly against, charge one openly with deceit or wrong doing, confront a person who has spread an evil report about one' (Johnson, 1939: 442).

To *-suta* a person you point the middle finger of the right hand down repeatedly over the head of another accusing the other of having done the very thing under discussion. Usually women do this to each other. For example, if two women are talking about a third who has had an affair, the first woman

<sup>3</sup> There is a third type of gesture, in addition to the illustrative and emblematic, involving mimicking actions accompanying what is being discussed. These are usually obvious in intent, e.g. referring to eating, drinking, sleeping, etc. Illustrators, emblems, and mime as instances of gesture have been looked at from a cross-cultural (albeit European-centred) level (Morris *et al.*, 1981) and in Swahili society specifically (Claessen, 1982). Morris *et al.* (1981) concentrated on the symbolic as opposed to the mimic type of gesture as involving 'a process of abstraction requiring the acceptance of local convention' (p. xvii) for its interpretation. Thus, in their cross-cultural study Morris and his colleagues wanted to discover what symbolic/emblematic gestures exist and are understood in a number of places which require an abstract interpretation and which people are aware of performing.

may *-suta* the second meaning 'Who are you to talk about affairs?' much in the sense of the English 'It takes one to know one'.

*ku-tongoza* 'to seduce by means of words, signs, dress' (Johnson, 1939: 472).

To *-tongoza*, a man flutters his eyelashes to attract a woman.

*ku-sinzia* 'This word is used to describe thieves who steal while one of their number distracts the attention of the victim, *wevi sinzia*' (Johnson, 1939: 432).

To *-sinzia* also includes the practice of women closing their eyes to indicate that a person who has just appeared on the scene is someone they do not like.

There are other verbal independent gestures that stand for a whole sentence. One involves using the middle finger of the right hand pointing it back and forth at the right ear to mean 'Yes, yes, I hear what you're asking but I'm not going to do it' or 'I may be mad, but I won't do it'. Another makes use of the middle finger of each hand to point back and forth at each ear (right middle finger at right ear and vice versa) to mean 'I'm full of what I've heard' or as is commonly said in English 'I've had it up to here'. This gesture 'looks' to American English speakers as if it ought to mean 'in one ear and out the other', but it clearly has a different content in so far as it means you've retained everything rather than had it once and lost it. Another gesture involves biting the inside edge of the palm with one hand to mean e.g. 'I'll kill that so and so if I can find him or her'. To indicate that you did not hear someone say they would do something while others have said they did, you may clap your hands together once and then move them apart while tilting your head from side to side. To comment that you are not involved in what is being discussed you may hold both palms up while your elbows are at your side meaning 'I'm not involved in this, don't come to me'. Claessen (1982: 11) indicates this is used when a person has heard very good news and the gesture may be accompanied by lifting the eyes quickly upward and uttering praise to God 'Alhamdu Lillahi'. This gesture is used to remark that what happened happened without your causing it.

In Swahili the verb phrase *-ramba kishogo* (or *-lamba kisogo*) 'to lick the back of someone's neck' like *-suta*, *-tongoza*, and *-sinzia* refers to a gesture but is *never said* in conjunction with it. The verb phrase refers to the act of sticking out your tongue as a sign of contempt when someone's back is turned from you. This is done to let others know that you think contemptuously of the person who cannot see what you are doing. It is a way of letting people know you do not like someone without having to say anything to the person (cf. Johnson, 1939: 207 and 241).

One gesture that substitutes for a whole utterance substitutes for a specific sentence, *Tunauibonya*, 'We have eaten a lot of it' with 'it' referring to rice. The gesture involves placing the whole right arm in front of the left side of the mouth (hand in a fist and bent at the wrist with the fist at the left side of the mouth) and jerking the arm across the mouth. It means 'We have eaten a lot of rice' in our day or 'We've had good times'. The implication is that those days are over.

To comment that a person's ears ought to be boxed for having done or said something you may wave one hand back and forth vertically in front of your face (palm perpendicular to the face) meaning *nitakupigia kofi* 'I will box your ears'.

Other verbal independent gestures are less specific in meaning. For example you may let the palm of the right hand (placed atop the left palm) slide off the left hand at chin level. This is used, e.g., if someone said they would come back



to finish a task you paid for in advance—and then never does! The gesture indicates you expect they never will be back.

The edge of the right hand placed on the left palm indicates that a figure or measurement just given or a fact brought out is intended to be precise, exact. There are gestures for calling a person or sending someone away; flapping all fingers palmward with the wrist bent and arm raised from the elbow is a beckoning gesture. The same gesture using only the index finger beckons a person you have little regard for. Claessen (1982: 19) describes this gesture in its full finger form adding that the fingers are snapped to the palm. When done repeatedly 'it may indicate urgency'. He also points out that the gesture is done in reverse to get someone to leave (that is, you flap the fingers up from the palm).

There is a gesture said to be used only by women who hold up the right thumb and index finger to form a circle while keeping the mouth open to match. This is used e.g. when one woman discovers that another has done something she has also done and both are embarrassed about it. The gesture is a comment of shared complicity. The gesturer might say something like *Ela mena wewe!* 'I say—me AND you'.

In another gesture the right hand is placed over the chest and the head is bowed to the right side. This is used in greeting a person of higher status, serving as a comment that you recognize the other's high standing. It may also be used to indicate a feeling of love for someone.<sup>4</sup>

One other common verbally independent gesture on the Kenya coast is to rotate both hands raised vertically at the wrists to indicate that a competition is or is about to be taking place. This may be done by a witness to a heated discussion or by someone watching a race that is becoming close.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The word-plus-gesture form of greeting is also used in Swahili society with the traditional greeting of a younger person to an older person, of a woman to a man via '*Shikamoo*' and the reply '*Marahaba*'. See Claessen (1982: 8–9) for a discussion of the various gestures used in Swahili greetings.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to these gestures that are specific to Swahili society there are a number used by coastal Swahili speakers that also occur relatively commonly elsewhere in the world. For example, one may place the hand over the face to express shock or surprise (and may accompany this with the expression 'ah'); one may place the thumb and index finger of one hand close together up near the face to indicate a small thing; one may point with the thumb extended from the fist aimed toward one's own forehead to mean 'she/he got me between the eyes' or 'that got right to me'. It is also common in Swahili society to rub the two index fingers together back and forth to indicate that two people being talked about have a close relationship. Claessen (1982: 10–14) discusses a number of gestures Swahili people use to express sensations and emotions such as pleasant or unpleasant smells, annoyance, too much noise, pleasant surprise, wonder, shock, realization that you have made a mistake, sorrow, annoyance at having missed something, the fact that something tastes good or bad, anger, deep thought, and satisfaction. These gestures, as described by Claessen, would provide useful input to the cross-cultural survey material collected primarily in European countries by Morris *et al.* (1981). Claessen also noted the gestures that accompany sounds used in Swahili society to call animals such as cats, chickens, and goats.

The very common gesture of pointing one's index (or middle finger) to one's temple and moving it in a rotating/screwing motion against the temple is no stranger in Swahili society and not surprisingly may be accompanied by expressions such as *hana akili* 'He has no brains' or *akili zake zimemaribikia* 'Her brains have come completely destroyed on her' (cf. Claessen, 1982: 23).

Also some gestures used in Swahili society are pure mime, obvious to the onlooker even from outside. For example, there are gestures emulating a person taking a shower (which may be used to answer a question regarding where someone is), drinking, sweating; there are gestures to indicate you are cold or proud or cannot hear what is being said. There are other gestures that Swahili users share with other cultures. One is used when a person does not want his or her disagreement to be actually expressed in the discourse. This involves shaking your head, 'no', while listening to a speaker. Another 'behind the back' type of gesture is to rub the index finger of the right hand on the thumb of the left to tell someone you think they are doing something they should not be doing. Another gesture is used to indicate that the person being talked about

People in Swahili society also use gestures of seduction and acceptance of seduction while others in the context of this gestural behaviour are unaware of such a 'hidden agenda'. The rude and crude gesture accompanied by the Swahili expression *panda juu*, lit. 'climb up', is identical to the gesture in English-speaking society known as 'the finger'. It is interesting that the verbal accompaniment to 'the finger' in Swahili uses the verb *-panda* because this makes the expression that goes with the gesture in many ways ambiguous. *-panda* in Swahili is used to mean 'to plant a seed', 'to mount a horse', 'to mount (usu. a woman) in sexual intercourse', and 'to advance' in rank or work to get an increase in pay.

In general from what we have seen so far it seems that the less associated with a verbal form a verbal independent gesture is, the more exclamatory it is (as opposed to being commentative) in function. We may exclude 'the finger' as an apparent exception to this, perhaps due to its very cross-cultural nature and influence from the West where verbal accompaniments to the gesture are not dissimilar to *panda juu*. Some credence may be given to this rationalization of 'the finger', clearly an exclamation, as verbally associated by considering a gesture I have seen used in Swahili imitative of raising one's glass and saying 'Cheers' when a group of people are about to take a drink. I was told that in Swahili one raises one's glass saying *juu* 'up' and then moves it toward one's lips saying *chini* 'down' and that *juu/chini* is how you 'say' 'Cheers!' in Swahili. It could just be the case that *panda juu* for how you 'say' 'the finger' came about the same way.

Thus, we assert that emblematic gestures in Swahili society which are not referred to by verbal forms have an exclamatory function while verbally independent gestures that are associated with speech (*-suta*, *-ramba kishogo*, *-tunabonya*, etc.) serve as comments within the context of discourse. That is, 'pure' gestures exclaim without moving discourse along, while 'speech-related' gestures actually add content to a conversation and keep it moving. Both gestural exclamations and comments are distinct from strictly verbal exclamations (as described e.g. in Eastman, 1983) and strictly verbal comments (other 'words' categorized as *vielezi* in the language). The three categories of communication, except for the non-gestural *vielezi* as seen in part in Table 1, are interpretable only in a discourse context functioning either to evoke an expected piece of behaviour or comment on one that has just taken place. That is, gestural exclamations and comments and verbal exclamations are pragmatic aspects of communication.

#### *Verbal dependent gestures: discourse comments*

In addition to gestural exclamations, gestural comments, and spoken exclamations, there is a fourth category of communicational forms in Swahili that are pragmatic in nature. These require both the auditory and visual communicative channels working together in order to be interpreted. They involve the union of the spoken with the seen, the heard with the performed.

Eastman (1983) looked at spoken exclamations as a word-class in Swahili based on pragmatic function, each member of which is associated with particular cultural behaviour. They function to express social mores and abrogations, to

by you and someone else can hear you now and you want the person you are talking to to become aware. This is done by sticking the tongue 'out the corner of the mouth on the side where the person discussed can be seen. Simultaneously the pupils of both eyes are turned in the opposite direction' (Claessen, 1982: 27). The particular mode of performance of this gesture may be specific to Swahili society but the meaning is obvious cross-culturally.

supply incentive, to accompany ritual (symbolic exclamations), or to catch people's attention (to surprise or warn them). These spoken exclamations aid in forming the text of day-to-day life. Here we turn our attention to a class of communicational items comprised of context sensitive utterances obligatorily associated with specific gestures. These verbal/visual units are an integral part of Swahili as a system of communication as well as a linguistic system.

Where many spoken exclamations (*viingizi*) are evoked by the discourse context and all intend to evoke behaviour in context, all gestural/speech units are evoked by context and are a reaction to it. They are emphatic responses to behaviour with emphasis indicated by the combination of the two communication channels. Gestures without necessary verbal accompaniment (as described in the previous section), in contrast, are totally geared to the visual channel only. They may function to express the unspeakable, some in order to evoke behaviour, others to comment emphatically on behaviour that has already taken place. Those verbally independent gestures which are codified by verbal forms referring to them but not used with them were seen to function as comments while strict gestures (not labelled) were exclamatory.

In this section we present a description of the verbal dependent gestures that emerged during our videotaping project on gesture. Here, all may be seen to function as *vielezi*, to express views on the cultural behaviour taking place in the discourse context. These forms may be seen as evaluative, used when either speech or gesture alone would be inappropriate and, at the end of this section, we will show how these forms range along a continuum from being almost entirely gestural (i.e. the gesture is arbitrary and the label that goes with it has no other referential meaning in the language) to being almost entirely linguistic (the movement is an emphatic mime of what the words literally mean). The verbal dependent gestures starting from the most arbitrary language and gesture combinations as the most opaque to the most transparent (visually and linguistically rather obvious) are :

*salala* : to perform this instance of visible speech requires putting both hands palm down on top of your head. As mentioned earlier this form is listed in the new Standard Swahili dictionary (*Kamusi ya KiSwahili Sanifu*, 1981) as an expression showing surprise. However, the spoken *cum* gestural expression is a commentative response to a question such as *Itakuwaje mtu mmoja anywe pipa zima la maji?* 'How would it be if a person were to drink a whole cask of water?' Johnson (1939: 408) sees *salala* as an exclamation of astonishment (without an accompanying gesture) saying that it may come from the Arabic exclamation 'God forbid', or 'May God be unwilling'.

*tongo* : the gesture referred to as *tongo* is a version of what Morris *et al.* (1981) refer to as the 'eye-pull'.<sup>6</sup> While saying *tongo*, you place the extended forefinger of one hand below the centre of the eye (left hand/left eye and vice versa) and tug the skin downward. As Morris *et al.* noted, 'This has the effect of opening the eye wider, and is performed while looking straight at the companion' (1979: 70). *Tongo* as a verbal dependent gesture in Swahili expresses the idea that what you, the speaker/gesturer, have just reported is absolutely accurate. There are two possible senses in which this is intended. For example, *tongo* may be used to comment 'Let me go blind

<sup>6</sup> As a verbal dependent gesture *tongo* occasions a shift in word-class of the noun *tongo* (pl. *matongo*) used to refer to the thick eye discharge common in the eyes when people wake up in the morning (known colloquially as 'sleep' or what the 'sandman' leaves in our eyes).



if I've seen her after having told you I have not' or 'I saw her with my own eyes, I really did'. The eye-pull has the effect of showing there is no *tongo* 'sleep' in your eye to have interfered with the accuracy of your perception. If you were inaccurate then, perhaps, you would deserve *tongo* to the extent you would be blind. Morris *et al.* (1981) report the eye-pull to mean most commonly 'I'm alert'. This fits in with the usage here, i.e. the gesturer wants the people being addressed to know that she or he is aware. The Swahili usage, however, has an accuracy-after-the-fact dimension that does not permeate the European examples. One uses *tongo* after having made a comment to emphasize the first comment's accuracy, i.e. unlike the meaning of the European eye-pull, *tongo* is not used to indicate that accuracy is ongoing.

*hng'ʔng'*: Another gesture accompanied by vocalization is perhaps most accurately represented as *hng'ʔng'*, i.e. a breathy syllabic velar nasal followed by a glottal catch and another syllabic velar nasal. Clearly this is aberrant as a 'word' in Swahili from the point of view of syllable structure and usual sound combination. The vocalization itself, however, is constrained by the gesture that goes with it. Both hands are used to push the nose inward on each side starting from the top and moving down the nose, while the lips are closed and the sound is emitted with a high pitch resulting in *hng'ʔng'*. When the hands reach the tip of the nose they release the nose, the lips are opened and the vocalizing ceases in an audible release. *Hng'ʔng'* is used to indicate to others that the gesturer detects a bad smell (cf. *p.u.* in English said while holding the tip of the nose with the thumb and forefinger). The sound *hng'ʔng'* is clearly audible as two syllables. Without the vocalization, this gesture alone might be thought of as mime. The specificity of the vocalization however lends this gesture combined with it enough of the requisite abstraction and convention to analyse it as a symbolic form. The hands on the nose might mean 'smell' imitatively but the value 'bad' assigned to the verbal/gestural unit clearly involves an abstraction from and understanding of the syllables emitted *via* the hands moving down the nose while the lips are closed and then released.<sup>7</sup>

*us*: like *hng'ʔng'*, *us* is an utterance tied to and constrained by its gestural aspect. To perform *us* requires that the index finger be placed to the parted lips at the time of vocalization. Like *hng'ʔng'*, *us* at first glance would appear to be more imitative than symbolic. But *us* as a verbal/gestural unit means more than the rather and obvious exclamatory warning 'shut up!' conveyed by *us!* alone without the associated gesture. It is used after certain behaviour leads you to believe that a child or another person is about to make a scene, create noise, or start to cry in earnest. When used by an adult to a child it means 'I sense something about to start'. It is a comment on behaviour that has led the gesturer to expect that a scene is imminent. Without the gesture, *us!*, like *sh!* in English (without a gesture as well) is more exclamatory and is used when you need someone to stop talking so you can hear something else (e.g. a telephone or doorbell or a baby crying in another room). Without the gesture the vocalization means

<sup>7</sup> This analysis also applies to the English gesture and sound combination. It is interesting that in both cases the vocalized gesture involves stopping and releasing both the nose and the lips (an obvious reference to avoiding the offensive odour). In the English version the nose is held while the first syllable (p. i.e. /pi/) is pronounced) and released with the lips fully opened during the second (u. i.e. /yu/). Here in both instances we see body movement and sound combining instrumentally in meaning. After commenting on a bad odour with *hng'ʔng'*, one might add an elaborating sentence such as *chanuka uvundo* 'It smells (bad)'.

‘ I need to be able to listen for a minute ’. With the gesture it means ‘ From something you’ve done, I think you’re about to fuss ’ and ‘ I wish you wouldn’t ’.

Verbal dependent gestures, for the most part, are emphatic comments. Like exclamations they are context-bound. An added gestural aspect (again in the same context adding the requirement of visual as well as auditory attention to the space) to certain exclamations supplies an intensive elaborated message to the combined gesturo-verbal meaning, meaning not conveyed by gesture or vocalization alone. Something really incredible is verbally and visually remarked upon via *salala*. The verbalization of *salala* without the gesture indicates surprise without the added meaning that what is surprising is something the seer/hearer does not believe possible. Likewise, unimpeachable accuracy is verbally and visually remarked via *tongo*; we can see and hear how bad a *hng’?ng’* remarked aroma is; and we are shown as well as told that a scene is imminent with *us*.

*p?thu p?thu*: another gesture that has verbal accompaniment somewhat like *hng’?ng’*, i.e. it is onomatopoeic rather than arbitrary and symbolic and also deviates from the normal sound pattern of Swahili. *P?thu p?thu* is a sound imitative of spitting and is accompanied by spitting. This vocalized gesture is performed while the right hand is pushing down on the fingers of the left hand starting from the little finger and working to the index finger. This would be used e.g. when an old woman accuses your child of being lazy. You defend your child first by denying the accusation, then, you perform this gesture and verbally imitate the sound of spitting as well in order so to protect your child from the ‘ evil eye ’. The idea is that your child has been accused and you must defend the child’s reputation in response. By the same token it is customary not to praise a child because praise will bring on a curse. So, you defend the child by denying the accusation and then comment further to cancel out any praise (implicit in your denial) by spitting, imitating the sound of spitting, and performing the hand gesture.

*turuba*: Claessen (1982: 25) describes a gesture with verbal accompaniment used to comment that the porridge is too watery. This is *turuba* performed by ‘ Moving the hand up and down in front of the body as if holding a big wooden spoon. At the same time the onomatopoeic word “ turuba ” is spoken ’. Unlike *tongo*, a noun as well as a *kielezi* (comment), *turuba* (like *salala*) has no ‘ other ’ meaning in Swahili. Unlike *salala* it may only be used in combination with the gesture described—that is, it exists only as a verbal dependent *kielezi* to comment on a given situation. It has no exclamatory use—it does not evoke behaviour. No one is expected to do something when they hear and see *turuba* but everyone is to know that not enough stirring took place when the porridge was made. The gesture is mime and the vocalization idiosyncratic and the two have a specific reference together. The vocalization *turuba*, unlike *us* and *hng’?ng’* is perfectly ‘ good ’ Swahili phonetically and from the point of view of syllable structure yet has no other meaning apart from that combined with this gesture.

*fu*: *fu* (*bu*) like *salala* and *us* is an exclamation when used without an accompanying gesture and a comment on behaviour when matched with its specific gestural form. It stands midway between *us* and *salala* in terms of syllable structure being appropriately CV but somewhat aberrant as a

'word' in being monosyllabic.<sup>8</sup> As an exclamation (*kiingizi*) *fu* is used to mark, indicate, or emphasize an unfortunate deed, or something thrown down violently. Its use is an indication that the user expects to receive an apology or to have what was treated violently or unfortunately done over again appropriately. On the other hand, *fu* as a comment (*kielezi*) is uttered while a person wipes the right hand (palm inward) across the mouth from right to left. With this gesture *fu* is uttered with a high pitch (falsetto). It is used commonly after the verbal expression of an unfortunate deed, e.g.

*ankila.* *fu.*

'he ate it'. 'All of it . . . and, it was supposed to be saved and shared (with you).'

*ng'o*: *ng'o* (also *ng'o ng'o*) is an expression accompanied by placing the right thumb under the front teeth (while the other four fingers are loosely held in a fist form). While saying *ng'o*, wrist motion may be used to flick the thumb behind the teeth. *Ng'o*, like *fu*, often follows a verbal statement to reinforce what the speaker/gesturer has just said and to add more emphasis to it, e.g.

*sikupi.* *ng'o.*

'I won't give you any.' 'You can be absolutely sure I won't give you any no matter what.'

*afa aleik*: is a verbal dependent gesture that expresses regret. You bite your index finger, then snap it with a flick of the wrist. It means 'Damn, wish I hadn't done that'. The verbal part of the communicational unit is Arabic and literally (without the gesture) means 'disaster to you' or 'damn you'. Interestingly, the verbal form and gesture combination expresses self rather than other condemnation—hence, perhaps, the biting of your own finger and, also, the intent 'damn to you—my finger!'. This is used to let others know you wish you had not just done or said something. Claessen describes this same gesture without verbal accompaniment as expressing 'annoyance for just having missed something', i.e. as an exclamation of anger. According to his description the 'Index of right hand is raised to the mouth and bitten; this is immediately followed by releasing the index and letting it strike with a snapping sound against the thumb and middle finger of the same hand; mouth is left open and face contracted' (1982: 12).

*wallahi*: if a person uses the index finger of the right hand and slices along the neck with it from one ear to the other while saying *wallahi*, the idea is that you, the gesturer/sayer, swear by God (i.e. *Willahi*) that you saw what you said you did, or mean what you said even though people are expressing doubt. As an exclamation without gestural accompaniment *wallahi* is used in oath-taking to get people to believe you are telling the truth (cf. Eastman, 1983).

*lo lo lo*: to express surprise one may slice the fist of the right hand (thumb and index finger end of the fist against the mouth) back and forth across the mouth while repeating *lo lo lo*, flapping the tongue against the fist giving the expression a kind of rolling sound. Unlike *salala* this *lo lo lo* form means that you are agreeably surprised at what has happened but you had not thought it impossible. There is an element of acceptance to *lo lo lo* where with *salala* and its gesture there is an effort at denial. *Lo* said once and without gesture is a common exclamation of surprise used when you are

<sup>8</sup> CV syllable structure in Swahili is generally reserved for the copula and connectives; so-called 'monosyllabic' verbs adjust their shape morphophonemically belying any real monosyllabicity at all.

startled and expect an explanation of what surprised you to be forthcoming. *hichi changu*: some verbal dependent gestures take phrasal verbal forms rather than single words or syllables. One of these is *hichi changu* (or *hiki changu*) which has the literal meaning in Swahili 'This is mine'. *Hichi*, 'this', in the phrase refers to 'chin' (*kidevu*) and the gesture accompanying the phrase involves the thumb and index finger of the right hand encircling the chin (index finger on top, thumb below) and then pulling the chin sideways to the right. Claessen (1982: 24) saw the movement of *hichi changu* to be 'as if one wants to remove the chin or beard'. The gesture plus its verbal accompaniment is used to comment that a person, who appears not to, 'should have respect for other people's property' (loc. cit.).<sup>9</sup> One context for using *hichi changu* (note that *hichi changu* is pronounced /hii chichángu/ when used gesturally) would be if your child were mixed up with the wrong crowd, you might say (with regard to your child) to another person *hichi changu* and perform the gesture to mean 'It's my chin', i.e. if the child gets into trouble it is going to reflect on you and furthermore you feel that the child will get into trouble, given the company the child is keeping. If the child, perchance, does not end up in trouble then *ndoo uniyowe kwa kigae* 'you can come and shave me with a piece of glass'. That is, the *hichi changu* interchange is somewhat akin to saying in English (albeit without the gesture) 'It's skin off my back' if the child goes astray and I know the child will and if he does not (I'm so sure he will) 'I'll eat my hat'.

*kidevu cha mtume*: another gesture also involves the 'chin' and it is referred to by a label that has meaning independent of the gesture. The referential label is *kidevu cha mtume* 'chin of the Prophet' said while cupping the chin with four fingers of the right hand on top and the thumb under. This phrase may be used by children as well as adults to mean that you really want something another person has. The gesture and phrase combination say to another person 'I don't just want it, I really want it'. Unlike any other forms we have looked at so far this phrasal dependent gesture may also be invoked to refer to another person, e.g. *nakushika kidevu* 'I hold your chin' (said while performing the *kidevu cha mtume* gesture on your own chin not the viewer/hearer's) meaning 'I've now got what you didn't want me to have'. In some ways this is reminiscent of the English 'By the hair of your chinny-chin-chin' meaning that the person saying this got by with something despite another person's protestations.

Thus far in this section we have looked at 13 Swahili verbal forms that are associated with gesture. These may be seen in the summary above to fall into a continuum of speech + gestural combination ranging from units of referential vocalization + imitative gesture close to the verbal end of a verbal-non-verbal communication continuum to units of arbitrary vocalization + arbitrary gesture at the non-verbal end. The forms looked at here represent five different points on such a continuum. In addition to the end-points exemplified at the verbal or 'language' end by *hichi changu* and *kidevu cha mtume* and at the non-verbal or 'gesture' end by *ng'o* (*ng'o*) and 'lo lo lo', there are units of referential vocalization + arbitrary gesture (e.g. *wallahi*, *afa aleik*, *salala*), cases of onomatopoeic vocalization + imitative gesture (*turubá* according to Claessen (1982), *hng'ng'*, *us*, and *pʔthu pʔthu*), and one instance of onomatopoeic vocalization combined with an arbitrary gesture in *fu*.

<sup>9</sup> Claessen noted a variation used in the Kenya coastal village of Shimoni such that the hand pulling the chin pulled the chin forward rather than to one side.

### Conclusion

When we look at gesture as communication, communication closely linked to language, we begin to blur any language use/communication distinction as well as any distinction between verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. In fact we begin to see communication as a multi-channelled form of expressive behaviour. Here we see specifically hand and facial movements particularly related to the concomitant production of sound with a communicative function.

But why be restricted to hand and facial movements, on the one hand, and movement of the vocal apparatus on the other, as discrete (even when paired) systems? In the case of *hng'png'* we saw how gesture is used to produce an unusual Swahili verbal expression, yet one that fits into a class of many other verbal expressions, that of *vielezi* or context-bound comments. Some scholars of expressive behaviour have looked at dance or theatre as multi-channelled communicative forms. In fact theatre and dance both use 'visual, aural, tactile, and kinesthetic channels' (Royce, 1977: 202). Artaud (1958: 89) sought to liberate theatre from its role as a vehicle for the written or spoken word and called for a view of theatre as 'a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought'.

One may distinguish forms of expressive behaviour that take place primarily in space and those that take place primarily in time (cf. Royce, 1977: 203). Language (speech) is a linear form of expression comprehended only as sequentially presented information. However, dance, theatre, and mime are visual arts whose content may be observed spatially and holistically as well as temporally and linearly. Interestingly, verbal dependent gestures also blur this space/time distinction. Their verbal aspect needs to be understood only in their context of occurrence and not as normal linear speech. This was observed also by Eastman (1983) who looked at exclamations as verbal gestures constituting whole utterances interpretable *only* in context. Thus, exclamations themselves constitute a somewhat non-linear space-dependent aspect of language. Gestures with verbal accompaniment carry language use one step further into the domain of comprehension in patterned space rather than only in patterned linear sequences of time.

We are intrigued by the crossover of linguistic function seen here between verbal and visual speech. Particularly noteworthy to us is the observation that linguistic exclamations and imitative gestures function primarily to call for behaviour while speech + gesture units and gestures that substitute for whole utterances are commentative.

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