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The pragmatic functions of the marker *sawa* in spoken Swahili¹

Abstract

This study examines the pragmatic functions of the marker *sawa* in spoken Swahili. The data have been obtained from informal conversations made by Swahili speakers in informal social settings. These settings include “*vijiwe vya kahawa*” (setting of informal conversations created around people drinking coffee) and “*vijiwe vya mamantilie*” (setting of informal conversations created around women preparing and selling food on the streets). The analysis of the data, performed within the framework of the contextualization theory (Gumperz 1982), shows that, apart from its basic connotation of *agreement*, the marker *sawa* conveys other meanings, depending on these very contexts of communication, and therefore acquires also various pragmatic functions. The pragmatic functions identified in this work include: *to show that the speaker agrees with what has been said but on a condition* (I agree, but...), as a *receipt marker*, as a *tag-positioned-comprehension check*, as an *answer to the question showing that the speaker has understood what has been said* (Yes, I understand), as a *continuer*, as a *negative releasing marker*, and as a *gap filler*. Interestingly, the study shows also that intonation and other paralinguistic features (like gestures) play a role in determining the pragmatic functions of this marker. The article concludes that the pragmatic markers in spoken Swahili are rich in meanings and are used to show speakers' attitudes and emotions, therefore manifesting a deep and meaningful interconnection between the language and its contextualized experience.

Keywords: pragmatic markers, spoken Swahili, contextualization theory

¹ This study is part of my PhD research entitled *The Analysis of functions of pragmatic markers in spoken Swahili* that is still in progress.

1. Introduction

Recently, studies on spoken language in real life contexts increased substantially. As a result, some of the features previously considered “empty”, “superfluous” and “redundant”, are now regarded as crucial aspects of interpersonal communication (Alami 2016: 250). These aspects include what we call Pragmatic Markers (PMs). PMs are linguistically encoded clues which signal the speaker’s potential communicative intentions (Fraser 1996: 168). They provide information for interlocutors how to interpret the relation between the current utterance and the previous utterance, or the other way around. PMs have one core meaning which is procedural rather than conceptual, although their specific meanings can vary depending on the context (thus becoming pragmatic meanings) (Nasir 2017: 15). Since the invention of the PMs by Schiffrin (1987), who worked on discourse markers in English, research efforts have expanded and PMs have been researched across languages, such as English (Beach 1995, Guthrie 1997), German (Barske 2009), Dutch (Hoek 2013), Modern Greek (Archakis 2001), Chinese (Chen & He 2001), Italian (Banzanella 1990), Spanish (Durán & Unamuno 2001), Turkish (Yilmaz 2004), and Indonesian (Nasir 2017), to mention but a few. PMs have been explored within a large number of frameworks reflecting a variety of research interests, methods and goals (Schourup 1999). Despite more general acknowledgement that PMs serve a purpose within utterances, the definition of PMs itself is disputed among researchers. Even the term PMs is not completely uniform. They have been studied by different researchers under different labels, like, for instance, pragmatic markers (Brinton 1996; Fraser 1996), discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987), discourse connectives (Blakemore 1989), discourse operators (Redeker 1991), discourse particles (Abraham 1991), pragmatic particles (Ostman 1983), and pragmatic expressions (Erman 1987). The various terms used to name these features are illustrative of the diversity of functions PMs perform (Alami 2015). In this study I will refer to *sawa* as a marker; a general term to cover both lexical-semantic and pragmatic functions.

Scholars also argue on how PMs work in language. O’Neal (2013) for example argues that PMs are polysemous, that is to say they manifest different meanings in different contexts. According to Yang *et al.* (2006) intonation, pitch and duration can differentiate the intended meaning of the speaker. On the other hand Barske (2009) explains that embodied actions such as eye gaze, hand movements or facial expressions are important clues that help to understand the meaning of PMs. Therefore PMs have some unique linguistic characteristics in conveying meanings which need to be investigated taking into consideration not only the spoken language but also and importantly its unique communicative

experience. The current study examines the pragmatic functions of the marker *sawa* in spoken Swahili. The marker *sawa* is equivalent to *okay*, *yes*, *well* and *like* in English. In this paper we will make reference on the PM *okay*² because it is more equivalent to *sawa* in Swahili.

PM *okay* has been researched more in English (cf. Schegloff & Sacks 1973, Guthrie 1997, Kovarsky 1989, Condon 2001, Schleeff 2008, Gaines 2011) to name but a few. Outside the corpus of research on *okay* in English, only few scholars examine other language contexts, such as American English (Levin & Gray 1983), Canadian French (Heisler 1996), Nigerian English (Adegbija & Bello 2001), Israeli Hebrew (Maschler 2005), German (Barske 2009), Taiwan Mandarin (Wang *et al.* 2010) and Arabic (Azi 2018). The differences in meaning of the PM *okay* in two different varieties of English, as noted by Adegbija and Bello (2001), help us to understand that despite the similarity, the meanings of the PM *okay* are specific to specific language.

While *okay* is receiving growing consideration in literature, however, there has been little effort to investigate PMs in the Swahili language. Few studies have been done in spoken Swahili. The examples are the works by Habwe (1999) and Susan (1999). Since it was not their aim to investigate the marker *sawa*, we lack some useful information on how *sawa* is used in natural conversations. We only get few meanings from Swahili dictionaries like those of BAKIZA (2010), TUKI (2012), Gicharu (2015), BAKITA (2017), and Wamitila (2018). These include its use in showing *correspondence*, *agreement* and *correctness*. Therefore, this paper aims to present a systematic interactional use of this marker in natural settings. The marker *sawa* has been chosen because the results of a pilot study showed that *sawa* is frequently used by Swahili speakers in different conversational contexts and hence it performs various pragmatic functions. The study investigates the pragmatic functions of the marker *sawa* in spoken Swahili. The spoken language was chosen because language is designed for communication, so there are some important cues in conveying meaning that can be found in spoken language and not in written language. Also, spoken language is rich in PMs compared to written language (Stede & Schmitz 2000: 125, Fung & Carter 2007: 410).

² It is important to acknowledge that different authors use various spellings of *okay*. For instance Schegloff and Sacks (1973) spell this PM as 'O.K.', Condon (1986) uses the spelling 'OK', Adegbija and Bello (2001) use both 'Okay' and 'OK', Barske (2009) uses 'ok' and others prefer 'okay' (e.g. Beach 1995, Guthrie 1997). All four spellings refer to the same phenomenon. I chose to use 'okay' when quoting directly from the research carried out by other authors because this spelling has been used most frequently.

2. Theoretical and methodological background

This research adopted the contextualization theory, as intended by Gumperz in his *Discourse Strategies* (1982). The theory deals with natural language or natural interaction. Gumperz argues that any utterance can be understood in numerous ways, and that people make decisions about how to interpret a given utterance based on their definition of what is happening at the time of interaction. He insists on how utterances are anchored in contexts, contexts which in turn make the interpretation of these utterances possible. Aspects of a context may be the larger activity participants are engaged in (the speech genre), the small-scale activity (or speech act), the mood (or key) in which this activity is performed, the topic, but also the participants role (the participant constellation, comprising "speaker", "recipient", "by-stander", etc), the social relationship between participants, the relationship between a speaker and the information he/she conveys via language (modality), even the status of focused interaction itself. A context, therefore, is not just given in such an interaction, but is the outcome of participants' joint effort to make it available. It is about what is relevant for the interaction at any given point of time. A context can be revised, i.e. assumptions can be removed or added to it.

According to Gumperz, language is considered as an activity, emphasizing that although we are dealing with structured ordering of message elements that represents the speakers' expectations about what will happen next, it is not a static structure, rather it reflects a dynamic process which develops and changes as the participants interact. Therefore, meaning is also assessed as the activity which is shaped by and shaping context. Thus meaning cannot only be adequately described by the lexical items glosses used, but also with an attentive analysis of the whole communicative experience in which they occur as part of routinized interactive exchange.

Gumperz (1982: 131) defines contextualization as a relationship between a speaker, a context (a cognitive construct like a frame, a schema), an utterance and a (non-referential) contextualization cue. Contextualization cue is, then, any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signaling of contextual presuppositions; contextualization cues include features of language (i.e elements of linguistic structure such as words and syntax) and paralinguistic features such as pitch, tempo, intonation³, stress, rhythm, laughter, and nonverbal signals

³ Prosodic features such as intonation, tone grouping, accent placement and tune play a role in segmenting the stream of talk, signaling thematic connections and providing information about activities. These contextualization cues are considered as semiotic entities that help to convey meaning (Gumperz 1982).

(gestural signs⁴). I decided to use this theory because the functions of *sawa* depend much on the context of use. Thus, our research hypothesis is that the functions of the marker *sawa* depend on various contextualization cues such as what has been said before or after the PM *sawa*, the intonation used, and the embodied actions accompanying the utterance containing *okay*.

This research was conducted in Dar es Salaam and Tanga in Tanzania from August 2018 to September 2018. In Dar es Salaam, the research was conducted in Manzese ward found in Ubungo region. In Tanga the research was done at Ngamiani-Kati ward found in Tanga-Mjini Region. Data were obtained from “*vijiwe vya mazungumzo*” (informal conversation in specific settings). Two types of *vijiwe* were used to collect data. These were “*vijiwe vya kahawa*” (setting of informal conversations created around people drinking coffee) and “*vijiwe vya mamantilie*” (setting of informal conversations created around women preparing and selling food on the streets)⁵. I decided to use the two kinds of *vijiwe* because it was easy to get data on PMs as people always talk about different issues in their lives while drinking coffee or preparing food⁶. The symbols used in the transcription especially for the PM *sawa* are explained in the attachment.

3. The functions of the marker *sawa* in spoken Swahili

Data obtained from “*vijiwe vya kahawa*” and “*vijiwe vya mamantilie*” revealed that the marker *sawa* has various functions. It can be used as a receipt marker.

⁴ Gumperz further argues that in the act of talking eyes, face, limbs and torso all emit automatically produced signs which tend to go unnoticed yet nevertheless convey information. The non-verbal signs are language-like in the sense that they are learned through interaction, culturally specific and analyzable in terms of underlying processes. They are coordinated with the verbal signs both at the micro-level of syllables and at the level of clauses and longer discourse segments. They can be used to show speakers' emotional states. They can also be used to frame the interaction and simultaneously reflect and signal transition from one stage of an encounter to another.

⁵ From each region, 5 *vijiwe* were for *kahawa* and 5 *vijiwe* were for *mamantilie*. In order to get 20 *vijiwe*, Snowball sampling technique was used. Researchers got some information about the location of one *kijiwe* from one person, then participants of one *kijiwe* were used to get information for other *vijiwe*.

⁶ This research is not a gender based study but we decided to use two types of *vijiwe* (*vijiwe vya kahawa* which are dominated by men and *vijiwe vya mamantilie* which are dominated by women) so as to obtain the data that reflect the use of PM by both genders. There were some cases where women participated in *vijiwe vya kahawa* and men participated in *vijiwe vya mamantilie*. Therefore, as long as the needed data were available, they were used irrespective of gender.

Here the marker *sawa* is used to respond to the previous utterance showing that the speaker has accepted the prior instruction, it is well understood and there is no problem with it. The following data from “kijiwe cha kahawa” and “kijiwe cha mamantilie” show that function:

Data No. 1 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

1. ... A. Mteja: nipatie kahawa.
'Customer: Give me coffee.'
2. B. **Sawa.** (Anamimina kahawa na kumpa mteja).
'Okay. (He takes coffee and gives it to the customer).'

Data No. 2 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

3. A. (Akimwambia msaidizi wa kazi:) Nenda kamuhudumie mteja.
'(Telling the helper:) Go and serve the customer.'
4. B. **Sawa.** (Anakwenda).
'Okay. (She goes).'

From the data, it is evident that the speaker A (in both conversations) gives some instructions to the speaker B (to be given some coffee or to serve the customer) and the speaker B responds by using the marker *sawa* to signal that they have received and understood what has been said. Here, *sawa* serves to link between the verbal and non-verbal actions. This means that after using the marker *sawa* the speaker performs the requested action.

In other contexts, it was observed that *sawa* can be used to mean *I agree with you but on a condition (I agree with you but.....)*. Here, the speaker can use the PM *sawa* to agree with what has been said but also indicating that he/she either needs some more explanations or he/she wants to add something contrary to what has been said.

Data No. 3 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

5. A. ... Sio kama nakutania we: muulize anakaa wapi.
'I am not joking, ask him where does he stay.'
6. B. Ana nyumba yake huyu.
'He owns his own house.'
7. A. **Sawa:** anayo nyumba, wapi:?:
'Okay, I agree that he has a house but where is it located?'
8. B. Ah! iwe Malamba: iwe Kifuru=
'Ah! Wherever it is, Malamba or Kifuru, I don't care.'
9. A. =Kifuru::?:
'Kifuru?'

10. B. Ndio kwake huko.
'Yes, it is where he lives.'
11. C. A:::h sio kifuru bwana...
'Oh! No. I am not living at Kifuru.'

Data No. 4 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

12. A. Raisi si mlimchagua wenyewe. Kwani mlichaguliwa? eh? Kura si mlipiga?
'You are the ones who voted for the president. Is there anybody who voted for you? Eh? You went there and voted, is it?'
13. B. Tulipiga kura **sawa**: lakini swali linakuja hazikuibwa? si ziliibwa tu=
'It is true that we voted but the question is weren't they stolen? They must be stolen.'
14. C. =Tunaaminije kama matokeo hayakuchakachuliwa?
'How can we believe that there were no some maneuvers?'
15. B. Wale bwana wana mbinu nyingi za kubadilisha matokeo.
'Those people have a lot of techniques to change the results.'
16. A. Ndiyo tushamchagua sasa. Tupambane na hali zetu tu...
'Now, we have already put him into position. The only thing we can do is to struggle with our own life.'

In these two conversations, *sawa* has been used to mean *I agree with you but on a condition*. For example in the Data No. 3 speaker A wanted to know where somebody mentioned in the conversation lives. Speaker B seemed to give an unrelated answer – instead of explaining where that person lives, he explains that that person owns a house. Speaker A in line 7 agrees by using the marker *sawa*: *it is true he has a house but he needed more information (where he lives)*. In the Data No. 4 participants in the conversation are discussing the voting for election. Speaker A is accusing others of being responsible as they are the ones who voted for. Speaker B agrees that they voted for but asks whether the votes were not stolen; the implied meaning of the speaker is actually an accusation: even though they voted, the votes were stolen. Therefore, in this context the marker *sawa* is used to convey the meaning *I agree with you but on a condition*.

In this function the marker *sawa* is used to signal that *the speaker agrees with what has been already said but is not happy about that*.

Data No. 5 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

17. A. ...Uwezo wako wa elimu ni mdogo:
'Your educational ability is low.'
18. B. **Sawa**↓, uwezo wangu wa elimu ni mdogo sana::: Mimi hata 'certificate' sina.
'Yeah, okay, I don't have much ability. I don't possess even a certificate.'

- Sasa tunataka wewe mwenye uwezo mkubwa utueleze
'So we want you who are more educated to explain to us.'
19. A. We nenda kalinde tu ndio kazi unayoiweza.
'Go and guard because that's what you can manage to do.'
20. B. Mimi kulinda nilishaacha siku nyingi.
'I am no more guarding, I left it long time ago.'
21. C. Jamani! haya yote maisha tu.
'Dears this is just life.'
22. B. Mcheki Wema Sepetu ana digrii yule?
'Look at Wema Sepetu, does she have a degree?'
23. A. Hana digrii yule.
'She doesn't have a degree.'
24. B. Ahah, nisikilize digrii hana, siyo?
'Okay, listen to me, she doesn't have a degree. Has she?'
25. C. Kwani digrii kitu gani?
'After all, what is a degree?'
26. B. Aha::! kumbe digrii sio kitu?
'Oh! So degree is not an issue?'
27. C. Digrii sio kitu?
'Degree is not an issue?'
28. B. Ni kitu cha kawaida tu? (huku akimtazama mzungumzaji A)
Sasa mbona huyu anaringa na digrii zake mbili?
'Is it just normal thing? (while looking to speaker A)
Why are you showing off with your two degrees?'
Atuambie elimu yake imemsaidia nini?
Mbona tunaishi wote maisha haya kawaida tu...
'He should tell us what does education help him?
I wonder we still live normal life together.....'

Here, while different speakers are talking, speaker A accuses speaker B to be uneducated. Speaker B replies using the marker *sawa* (see line 18) to show agreement with what has been said but also to demonstrate he was not happy with that (*I agree with you but I am not happy with that*). Contextualization cues such as what has been said before and after the PM, facial expression of the speaker (demonstrating him not being happy about speaker A's argument) together with the intonation (falling intonation) are clues to determine this function.

Also, the marker *sawa* can be used to signal that a *speaker has understood what has been already said but he/she needs some more information about some-*

thing else, different from what has already been said. The data from "kijiwe cha mamantilie" perform this function:

Data No. 6 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

29. A. (Anafika, anamwalia msaidizi wake) niletee kiti hicho.
'(She reaches, looking to her helper) Give me that chair.'
30. B. (Anachukua kiti na kumpa).
'(She takes the chair and gives her).'
31. A. Enhe: za hapa?
'Tell me, how are things going?'
32. B. Nzuri, alikuja mwenyekiti wa kijiji=
'Fine, the Village Chairman came here.'
33. A. =Mh! Amesemaje?=
'Mhmm! What did he say?'
34. B. =Alikuja hapa mimi nilikuwa naosha vyombo=
'He came here while I was washing kitchen utensils.'
35. A. =**Sawa**, akasemaje?
'Okay, what did he say?'
36. B. Akaulizama mama yako yupo?
'He asked is your mother around?'
37. A. Enhe.
'Mhmm.'
38. B. Nikamwambia hayupo amekwenda sokoni=
'I told him she is not around she has gone to the market.'
39. A. =**Sawa**, AKASEMAJE?
'Okay, what did he say?'
40. B. Akasema akirudi mwambie anahitajika serikali ya kijiji kesho saa tatu.
'He said when she is back tell her that she is needed by the village government office tomorrow at nine o'clock.'
41. A. Mh! Kuna nini tena!...
'Mhmm! What happened again...'

In this conversation speaker B is interested to know only what the village officer said and does not need any other information. Because his helper is not going directly to that point she keeps using the marker *sawa* to push for new information. In line 39 speaker A uses the marker *sawa* accompanied with the word *amesemaje* which is now spoken louder than before to push the other speaker to give the needed information. Speaker B in line 40 understands this and now she explains what the village officer said. Speaker A is now satisfied with the

information and the topic changes to what has happened for her to be called by a village officer. Therefore, from this context, it is evident that the marker *sawa* has been used to signal that a speaker has understood what has been already said but he/she needs some more information about something else different from what has already been said.

The marker *sawa* is also used as tag-positioned comprehension check. See the following example from the conversation made from “kijiwe cha mamantilie”:

Data No. 7 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

42. A. Angalia maji kama yamekauka kwenye nyama.
'Look if the meat has got dry.'
43. B. **Sawa.** (Anakwenda, anafunua sufuria, kisha anajibu) Bado.
'Okay. (She is going, opening the pan, then she answers) Not yet.'
44. A. Subiri mpaka maji yakauke kabisa ndiyo uongeze maji, **sawa?**
'Wait until it is almost dry then add some water, okay?'
45. **Sawa.**
'Okay.'

From the data above, I noted that the function of the marker *sawa* as a receipt marker was also observed (see lines 43 and 45). After every instruction speaker B responds with the marker *sawa* to show that she has heard and understood the instruction. Furthermore, here the marker *sawa* is also used as a *tag-positioned comprehension check*. In fact, *sawa* here is placed at the end of a sentence, therefore it is used to monitor the listeners' comprehension, to check and prove if the other speaker understood what has been said or not (*Did you get me? Understood?*). This function is always accompanied by rising intonation and is always followed by the response *sawa* (see line 45) to signal that the speaker has understood what has been said (*yes I understand*).

In other contexts, *sawa* was used as a tag question, but with slightly different functions from the one we have just observed before. Here the speaker uses *sawa* as a tag question not only to check for understanding, but also to put emphasis, to insist on what he/she is saying and to gain attention from other interlocutors.

Data No. 8 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

46. A. ... lakini, umekaa naye chini ukaongea naye?
'But did you have time to speak with her?'
47. B. Nimemshauri sana lakini hasiki:::
Ananiambia mama mimi nimempenda hivyo hivyo.

'I have advised her a lot but she is not listening.
What she tells me is that I love that guy no matter what.'

48. A. Kama umeongea naye na bado hataki kubadilisha msimamo,
Mi nafikiri wewe mkubalie tu. **Sawa?**

'If you have spoken to her and still she doesn't want to change her stand, Just agree with her. Okay?'

Watoto wa siku hizi hawa hawakawii. Utasikia keshakunywa sumu hapa. **Sawa?**
'Nowadays, Children can easily decide to take some poison. Okay?'

Yeye ni mtu mzima, maadam ameamua na anajua anachofanya mwache. **Sawa?**
'She is now matured and she knows what she is doing that's why she decides this. Okay?'

Yale unayomwonya leo atakuja kuyajutia baadaye na hilo litakuwa somo kwake.
'She will regret for what you are trying to warn her today.'

49. B. **Sawa**, nimekuelewa shoga yangu...

'Okay, I have understood my dear friend.'

In this "kijiwe cha mamantilie" speaker B keeps asking *sawa?* after making some arguments to emphasize what she is saying, to check for understanding and to gain attention from other interlocutors. When the PM *sawa* is used to perform this function it is also uttered with rising intonation like when it is used as tag-positioned comprehension check. There are some cases where the other interlocutors respond by saying *sawa* after every tag question and some where interlocutors just respond by nodding as it was the case with these data. When the PM *sawa* performs this function, it is always uttered repeatedly so as to make emphasis.

A further function of the marker *sawa* is to signal a sense of equality (or inequality).

Data No. 9 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

50. A.Watu wanachagua kazi matokeo yake wanabaki kuwa tegemezi tu.

'People choose what kind of job they prefer, as a result they just remain dependent.'

51. B. Mimi huwa nawakubali wakinga. Mkinga atakuja mjini hapa, anaanza kuuza karanga.

'I always appreciate Kinga tribe. People from this tribe will come here and start selling groundnuts.'

Baada ya muda anamiliki duka Kariakoo. Sasa hapo kuuza karanga na kukaa bila kazi ni **sawa?**

'and after some time he owns a shop at Kariakoo. So, selling groundnuts and remaining without work are they equal?'

52. A. =Sio **sawa**.

'They are not equal.'

53. B. Eh! Anayeza karanga ana uhakika hata wa kula lakini sio mtu anayeshinda kijiweni ilimradi siku iende. Ndiyo wanaishia kulalamika maisha magumu.
'Yes, the one who sells groundnuts is even sure of getting some food but not the one who just stays at kijiweni to pass time. They are the ones who end up complaining that life is difficult.'
54. C. Nyie mnaongea tu. Unafikiri ni rahisi kijana katoka Chuo Kikuu leo aanze kuuza karanga?
'You just talk. Do you think it is easy for a young man coming from the University to start selling groundnuts?'
Sio rahisi hata kidogo.
'Not easy at all.'
55. B. Unasikia bwana (anataja jina) hatusemi kama ni rahisi. Wewe unajua kuwa mfumo wetu wa elimu haujawaandaa vijana kujajili.
'Listen my dear, we don't say it is simple. You know that our educational system didn't prepare youth for self-employment.'
56. C. =**Sawa**:
'Yeah.'
57. B. Sasa kama mfumo haujawaandaa wanapokuja uraiani si wanaona wengine wana-vyohangaika kutafuta maisha?
'So if the system didn't prepare them when they came back into normal life didn't they see how other people suffer for life?'
58. C. **Sawa**:
'Yeah.'
59. B. Sasa na wao wanatakiwa kujiongeza. Biashara kama ya karanga inahitaji mtaji wa shi- ngapi?
'So they should think critically. How much capital is needed to do such business like selling groundnuts?'
60. C. Hapo ndiyo tunapishana. Wewe unafikiri ni rahisi kijana na digrii yake akauze karanga mtaani?
'That's where we do differ. You just think it is easy for a young man with his degree to go and sell some groundnuts.'
Mi- nafikiri suruhisho tubadili mfumo wa elimu. Kijana aandaliwe namna ya kujajili ili akifika mataani maisha yaendelee...
'I think the solution is to change the education system. Youth should be prepared on how to employ themselves so that when they come to the community their life becomes easy.'

In this discourse, participants are discussing the problem of unemployment, especially in youth. In line 51, speaker B uses *sawa* to ask a question whether the person selling groundnuts and the one with no job are equal or not. On the

other hand, Speaker A in line 52 uses the *sawa* as an answer, to show that they are not equal. So it is clear that in this context *sawa* is used to convey the sense of equality. The marker *sawa* has also been used in line 56 and 58 as an *affirmative releasing marker* (as a continuer). Here it is used to indicate approval of the previous utterance and to allow the speaker to continue talking. The continuation and the intonation used are the contextual cues that help the researcher to identify this function. In this context *sawa* is spoken with some continuation of sound /a/ in the second syllable and after each utterance of this marker speaker B continues talking to show that the use of *sawa* by speaker C allows him to continue speaking.

The marker *sawa* can also be used as a *negative releasing marker*, i.e. to release the other speaker from having to continue speaking, but in this case it indicates dissatisfaction with the previous utterance.

Data No. 10 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

61. A. Umewahi kuingia Manzese mapema:
'You have arrived early at Manzese.'
62. B. Kwa nini?
'Why?'
63. A. Saa hizi ushafika unaamka saa ngapi?
'You are here this time, at what time do you get up?'
64. C. Muulize mjomba anaamka saa ngapi.
'Ask my uncle at what time does he wake up.'
65. A. Ah! sasa mi nitamuuliza kwani wewe na huyu mnakaa nyumba moja?
'No, how comes I should ask him? Are you staying in one house?'
66. D. Ngoja nikwambie umbali wa pale-, wewe sikiliza kwanza mimi nataka nikwambie huyu kwanza ni mjomba wangu.
'Wait, let me tell you, the distance there- listen first, I want to tell you that this is my uncle.'
67. A. Eh **sawa**↓.
'Okay.'
68. D. Nataka nikusaidie kwamba wewe labda ulikuwa hujui.
'I want to tell you may be you didn't know.'
69. A. **Sawa**↓.
'Okay.'
70. D. Anajua huyu mpaka chumba ninacholala mimi.
'He knows even the room I am sleeping in.'
71. **Sawa**↓.
'Okay.'

72. D. Sio nyumba tu, ninajua mpaka chumba anacholala
'Not only the room, I know even the room he sleeps.'
73. A. **Sawa**↓, haina shida.
'Okay, no problem.'
74. D. Mi nikifika kwake mimi naagiza tu nina njaa:: naletewa chakula si nipo kwa mjomba angu...
'If I go to his house I just order food if I feel hungry because I am at my uncle's house....'

In this context speaker A is just wondering how the other speaker has managed to come early to Manzese. Then speaker B, instead of explaining himself why he manages to come early, gives the chance to speaker C (whom they call "uncle") to explain it. Speaker A is not satisfied with that as he asks why should he explain it instead of speaker B. Speaker C doesn't care about that and he continues explaining. After every turn, speaker A uses *sawa* as a negative releasing marker. Here speaker A allows the speaker to continue speaking but also showing that he is not satisfied with what speaker C is talking about. Speaker A uses the marker *sawa* accompanied by some facial expression of annoyance with the conversation. Also, in this context, the PM *sawa* was said with the falling intonation that shows dissatisfaction.

With respect to the previous function, it was observed that *sawa* can be used to show *dissatisfaction* but also conveying an *ironic sense of "I will catch you or I will deal with you later"*. Data from "kijiwe cha kahawa" and "kijiwe cha mamantilie" show this function:

Data No. 11 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

75. A. (Mama akiongea na mwanaye wa kiume:) Nimekwambia rudisha hapa!
'(Mother talking to her son:) Bring it here!'
76. B. Sirudishi!
'I won't do that.'
77. A. **Sawa**, wewe si unajifanya mjanja bwana...
'Okay then, you think you are clever. We shall see!...'

Data No. 12 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

78. A. ... Mh:: ikawaje?
'Tell me what followed?'
79. B. (Alimwambia:) bwana nasikia unatembea na mke wangu. Tafadhari achana naye.
'(He told him:) I heard that you are having an affair with my wife. Please leave her.'
(Alipoona hasikii akamwambia:) **sawa**, sasa tutapambana.
'(After realizing that he didn't listen he told him:) Okay, then I will deal with you.'

In the Data No. 11, speaker A is ordering the other participant to bring back something. Speaker B refuses to do that and speaker A uses the marker *sawa* followed by the utterance: *wewe si unajifanya mjanja* ("You think you are clever. We shall see!"), expressing a sense of dissatisfaction. Considering the relationship (being mother and son) it was expected the son could obey his mother. The act of disobeying brings dissatisfaction to his mother. Therefore the mother uses *sawa* as a warning she will deal with him later on (in this case the son might receive punishment). The Data No. 12 show a similar function: two participants are talking about somebody else's love affair. In line 78 speaker A encourages speaker B to tell the story and speaker B continues telling while quoting what was said by other people, sometime in the past. In this story somebody recognizes that the man under discussion was having a love affair with his wife and he warned him. Because he has not listen, he says *sawa, tutapambana* ("okay, then I will deal with you"). By using the marker *sawa* in this context the person shows dissatisfaction and communicates his intention to deal with him later on. Therefore *sawa* here is used to signal dissatisfaction and, more importantly, it is ironically used to warn the speaker on what is going to happen in the imminent future.

The marker *sawa* can be also used as a *predicative adjective or adverb to mean that the speaker is in good health or is used as a question to ask if the other person is in good health or not and if there is no other problem*. Let us consider the following example:

Data No. 13 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

80. A. Vipi upo **sawa**?
'Hey! Are you okay?'
81. B. Nipo **sawa**, mbona unauliza?
'I am okay, why are you asking?'
82. A. Naona kama umekosa amani vile.
'You look like you don't have peace of mind.'
83. B. Hapana, Nipo **sawa** tu...
'No, I am just okay.'

Data No. 14 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

84. A. Yaani, kichwa kinaniuma.
'You know, my head is aching.'
85. B. Pole sana, pumzika. Naamini utakuwa **sawa** si muda...
'Very sorry, have some rest. I believe you will be okay soon.'

In these two different contexts, the marker *sawa* signals a sense of being in good health. In line 80, speaker A is asking speaker B by using *sawa* whether

speaker B is in good health or whether there is any problem. In line 51, speaker B answer the question by using *sawa* to reply that she is in good health and there is no problem. Here *sawa* has been used as a question, uttered with rising intonation, and as an answer to a question, with normal intonation. In these examples *sawa* is used accompanied with verbs indicating state of being (like *upo*, *nipo* or *utakuwa* [*sawa*]) and others to mark the sense of being in good health. The same is also noted in line 85 where speaker B says *utakuwa sawa* to mean she will get better soon or she will be in a good health.

Related to the sense of being in good health, the marker *sawa* was also used as *a predicative adjective or adverb to mean all is correct, all is right, is satisfactory, is good, is well and that everything is in order.*

Data No. 15 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

86. A. Mezani pako sawa?
'Is it okay with everything on the table?'
87. B. Eh, nimeshasafisha.
'Yeah, I have already cleaned.'

Data No. 16 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

88. A. Vipi za kwenye sherehe?
'How was the celebration?'
89. B. Nzuri tu.
'It was good.'
90. A. Kila kitu kilikuwa **sawa**?
'Was everything okay?'
91. B. Ndiyo, mambo yalikuwa **sawa**...
'Yeah, everything was okay.'

Data No. 17 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

92. A. ...Vipi kuhusu taarifa za mwezi? mbona hamjatupa safari hii.
'How about the monthly report? You didn't provide it to us this time.'
93. B. Bado tunaweka mambo **sawa** tutawapa taarifa.
'We are still putting things in order, we will provide it to you.'

Data No. 18 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

94. A. Vipi, kesho utakuja?
'How about tomorrow? Will you come?'
95. B. Najaribu kuweka ratiba **sawa** nije.
'I am trying to schedule my timetable so that I can come.'

In these four different conversations, *sawa* is used to signify that things are in good order and satisfactory. In cases where the speaker is asked to report about the recent events, speaker B responds using the *sawa* to signify that he/she is trying to put things in order so that they can provide the report. Also in the Data No. 18 speaker B shows that he is trying to schedule the timetable so that everything could be okay for him to attend the meeting. Therefore, apart from showing the condition of being in good health, the marker *sawa* is used to signal that *all is correct, all is right, is satisfactory, is good, is well and that everything is in order.*

In other contexts the marker *sawa* performs slightly different functions from the two above-mentioned. In fact, it can be used to signal that *something was not well understood but now is well understood, was not in good order or in proper manner but now it is in good order or proper manner.*

Data No. 19 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

96. A. ...Akasema nimpe elfu kumi.
'He told me to give him ten thousand.'
97. B. Na ukampa?
'And you gave it to him?'
98. we:!
'Not at all, how should I start? '
99. Hapo **sawa**. Niliidhani ulimpa. Yule akikukopa, hiyo hela samehe tu maana hairudi.
'Now I got you. I thought you gave it to him. He usually doesn't return the money if I borrow it to him.'

Data No. 20 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

100. A. ...Wee! unaendaje na hicho kisketi dukani? Kavae baibui haraka.
'How can you go to the shop in such a miniskirt? Go and put on your purdah quickly.'
101. B. (Anakwenda kibandani anavaa baibui na kurudi).
'(She goes inside, puts on her purdah and then she comes back).'
102. Hapo **sawa**, mwanamke unatakiwa kujistiiri bwana sio unavaa vaa tu nguo za ajabu.
'Yeah, now it's all right, a woman should cover up and not just wear improper dress.'

Data No. 21 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

103. A. Hiyo sufuria imekaa upande.
'That pot is not properly set.'
104. B. (Anaiweka vizuri sufuria).
'(She goes and puts the pot the right way).'

105. A. Hapo **sawa**.

'Now it is okay.'

106. B. (Anaiachia sufuria).

'(She leaves the pan).'

In these three different conversations, *sawa* is used to signal that something was not well understood or was understood differently but now is well understood (see line 83). Furthermore, it is used to show that *something was not in good order or in proper manner but now it is in good order or in proper manner* (see lines 99 and 102). When the marker *sawa* is used to convey this meaning, it is always accompanied by the word *hapo* (*hapo sawa*).

The marker *sawa* can be used to mark *whether something is correct or not or whether what is said is correct or not*.

Data No. 22 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

107. A. ...Hili jambo la viwanja limetokea mpaka Amboni.

'This issue with land has also happened to Amboni.'

108. B. Eh.

'Yeah.'

A. Kuna watu yaani wameuziwa mashamba kwa ajili ya shughuli zao, ushaelewa?

'There are people who bought a piece of land for their activities, do you get me?'

109. B. Kama ulipewa sehemu ya kujenga sasa?

'What if you were given a place to build something?'

110. C. Kupewa sehemu ya kujenga ina utata kivipi:

unatakiwa ujue asili ya ile ardhi.

'To be given a place to build is ambiguous

because you need to know the nature of that land.'

Je, hii ardhi imeshaondoka kwenye mikono ya Serikali imeingia kwa wananchi moja kwa moja?

'If this is no longer owned by the Government and it is now directly in the hands of the citizens.'

111. A. Sasa si waliamua kuwagawia watu wajenge.

Watu wameanza kujenga, sasa wanasema bomba.

'If they decided to give it to people so that they can construct something.

People have started to construct it, why now they introduce another issue of pipeline?'

Eti bomba linapita hapa kwenye kiwanja chako unatakiwa ubomoe ni **sawa**?

'That the pipeline is passing to your plot so you have to destruct it, is it correct?'

112. A. Sio **sawa**.

'Not correct.'

113. C. Ni hivi, kama ile ardhi ilikuwaa inamilikiwa na wananchi basi kubomoa sio **sawa** lakini kama bado ilikuwa kwenye mikono ya Serikali, kubomoa ni **sawa** kwa sababu Serikali ianaweza kuchukua ardhi yake muda wowote. Kama iliwapa wananchi kihalali ndiyo inawalipa fidia.
'Let me explain, if the plot was owned by the citizens, then the act of destructing is not correct but if it was owned by the Government, then the action of destructing is correct because the Government can take its land any time. If the citizen were given the land legally it could refund them.'
114. B. EH! Sasa huyu mkurugenzi hataki kulipa!
Mtu umeshamwaga na mawe halafu unaitwa unaambiwa wewe huwezi kulipwa kwa sababu hujaanza kujenga na bomba linapita kwenye kiwanja chako. Kwanini wewe usilipwe?
'Yeah! But this director does not want to pay!
People have already poured out stones, then they call them and start telling you cannot be paid because you have not started the construction and the pipeline is passing to your plot. Why shouldn't you be paid?'
115. A. Unatakiwa kulipwa...
'You deserve to be paid.'

In this context of use, participants are discussing about the government evicting the citizens from their land to construct new pipelines. In line 111, speaker A is asking, using the marker *sawa*, whether for the other participants that action is correct or not. Speaker B answers the question using *sawa* to convey the meaning that that action is not correct (see line 112). Therefore in this context the marker *sawa* performs the function of conveying the meaning of *whether something is correct or not*.

Observing the following conversation made from "kijiwe cha kahawa", the marker *sawa* appears to convey the meaning of "acceptability", *to mean it is acceptable to me or the decision is acceptable to me*.

Data No. 23 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

116. A. ...Tukikutana jumatano si **sawa**?
'Will it be okay if we meet on Wednesday?'
117. B. Mimi **sawa**
'It is okay to me.'
118. C. Hata mimi **sawa**
'Even to me it is okay.'
119. A. Basi tukutane Jumatano.
'Okay, then we meet on Wednesday.'

120. B. [Sawa.]

'Okay.'

121. C. [Sawa.]

'Okay.'

Speaker A (see line 116) uses *sawa* as a question in order to get information if it is acceptable to meet on Wednesday. Speakers B and C (see lines 117 and 118) answer the question by using the PM *sawa* to mean that it is *okay* to them (the day is acceptable to them). In the same conversation, the marker *sawa* marks the closure of the conversation. After all members agree to meet on Wednesday, the speaker A (see line 119) says *okay* to mark the beginning of the closure of discussion (*Basi tukutane Jumatano*). Afterwards, speakers B and C use *sawa* to agree but also to conclude the conversation.

In a different contexts the marker *sawa* can be used as a *gap filler*:

Data No. 24 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

122. A. ...Unasemaje kuhusu hili bwana Ali.

'What is your argument about this agenda, Mr Ali.'

123. B. Sa::wa, unajua kuna mambo mawili, tunaweza kwenda moja kwa moja kwa mhusika au tukapitia kwa mjumbe wa mtaa.

'Okay, you know, there are two possibilities, either we can go directly to the responsible person or we go first to the street representative.'

Speaker A wants to hear speaker B's stance about the target issue. Speaker B starts speaking by using the marker *sawa* which, in this context, does not signal agreement or is not a receipt, rather it is used as a *gap filler*. In this context it is uttered with the prolonged sound /a/ in the first syllable. Here the PM *sawa* provides the speakers the opportunity to better organize his thoughts, in fact, after using the PM *sawa*, speaker B continues to give his suggestions. This is the kind of *gap-filling* role the marker *sawa* assumes here.

It was also noted that the marker *sawa* can be used as a quotative marker. The following data from "kijiwe cha kahawa" suggest this function:

Data No. 25 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

124. A. ...Unaonaje kama tukimpa masharti kwamba "**sawa**, tunakupa hizi pesa lakini utatulipa kwa awamu"?

'What if we set him a condition "okay, we give you these money and you will pay us back in phases"?'

125. B. Sawa, nafikiri ni wazo zuri lakini inabidi tuandikishiane

kabisaa maana anaweza kuturuka muda wowote

'I agree with you, I think it is a good idea but we have to document it because he can deny us any time.'

The speaker uses *sawa* to quote what one is planning to say sometimes in the future. Besides, in other contexts, it was observed that *sawa* can also be used to quote words that were spoken by somebody else in the past. Therefore, from this context it is evident that the PM *sawa* is used as a *quotative marker*.

In other contexts, the PM *sawa* is used to convey the sense of "I don't care", like in the following conversation:

Data No 26. (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

126. A. ...Mimi huwa nasema ifike kipindi
wanawake tuache kuwa ombelezi KWA WANAUME.
'I always say that it should come a time
when we women stop being beggars to men.'
127. B. Ni kweli, maisha ya kumtegemea mwanamme tu ni shida sana.
'You are right. Depending only on a man is a very big problem.'
128. C. Walau uwe na kitu cha kufanya sio kila siku kuomba tu.
'At least you should have something to do and not only beg every day.'
129. A. Ukiwa na pesa yako unaepuka hata baadhi ya maudhi.
Mimi bwana baba Jose akiamua kutoa hela **sawa**:
asipoamua **sawa**:.
'If you have your own money you even avoid some chaos.
For my side, if Jose's dad decides to give me some money it is okay,
and if not, it is okay as well.'
130. B. Eh, akikukumbuka **sawa**: asipokukumbuka **sawa**:.
Sio ndiyo mume hana pesa unaishia kulalamika tu
o:h mume wangu haachi hela ya kula..."
'You are right, if he remembers you it is okay, and if not, it is okay.
Not just that your husband has failed
to provide money for food and you remain complaining...'

By considering the contextualization cues (what has been said before and after the PM *sawa*), the way the PM was uttered (with a prolonged sound /a/ in the second syllable) and the gestures (like the hand movements) the marker *sawa* acquires the function of signaling that *the speaker doesn't care* (whatever will be done to him is correct).

In the following conversation too, the specific attention to the context (gestures, contextualization cues, and voice intonation) discloses how the PM *sawa* can be used as an answer carrying the meaning of "no problem".

Data No. 27 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

131. A. (Anafika na mzigo amejitwisha kichwani) Niweke hapa?
'(Reaches the place while carrying a luggage on his head) Should I put it here?'
132. B. **Sawa** tu.
'It's okay.'
133. A. (Anautua mzigo na kuuweka chini).
'(He puts the luggage down).'

Data No. 28 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

134. A. ... Nile chakula chote?
'Should I eat all of it?'
135. B. **Sawa** tu.
'It's okay.'
136. A. (Anaendelea kula).
'(He continues eating).'

In these two different conversations, Speaker A asks for permission (to put the luggage to a pointed place or to eat all food). Speaker B (in both conversations) answers using the PM *sawa* which is accompanied with the PM *tu* to signal that *there is no problem* (an indirect way of granting the asked permission). The action of doing the actions requested after the use of the PM *sawa* (see lines 133 and 135) shows that the permission has been granted and there is no problem about it.

Moreover, *sawa* is used to signal *whether something is correct or not correct*.

Data No. 29 (kijiwe cha kahawa)

137. A. ...Hivi kuchepuka ni **sawa**?
'Let me ask you, is it correct to cheat your wife?'
138. B. [[Hapana, si **sawa**]].
'No, it is not correct.'
139. C. [[Sio **sawa**]].
'It is not correct.'
140. A. Sasa kwanini watu wanachepuka wakati wanandoa zao kabisa?
'Why then people cheat while they have married already?'
141. C. Labda tumuulize Jose hapa (kisha anacheka kidogo).
'Maybe we ask Jose here (while looking at Jose).'
142. B. Kwani mimi ndiyo nachepuka?
'Is it me who is cheating?'
143. (A na C wanacheka).
'(A and C are laughing).'

144. C. Sijasema unachepuka labda unaweza kuwa na uzoefu wa watu wanaochepuka.
'No, I didn't say you cheat, I meant you might have the experience from people who cheat.'
145. B. Sasa kama ni uzoefu huo hata wewe unao bwana.
Tamaa tu, ninaweza kusema hivyo.
'You also have experience if that is the case.
What I can say it is a matter of personal desire.'
146. C. Eh, wengi wanaochepuka ni kwa sababu ya tamaa tu....
'Yeah, many people cheat because of their personal desire.'

In this conversation participants are discussing whether cheating is a correct behavior. Speaker A uses the marker *sawa* to ask the question and speakers B and C use it as an answer conveying the meaning that *it is not correct*.

One last example shows that the marker *sawa* can be used to signal that *the speaker doesn't want to hear anymore what the other person is talking about*.

Data No. 30 (kijiwe cha mamantilie)

147. A. We Anna hujasafisha meza. Mama akija HAPA.
'Anna, you didn't clean the table. You will see the consequences when mother arrives.'
148. B. (Anamwangalia mzungumzaji A bila kuongea lolote).
'(She just looks at her without saying anything).'
149. A. We Anna we: hujasafisha [meza-] shauri yako.
'Hey! Anna, you didn't clean the table. It's up to you.'
150. B. [**SAWA**] si nimesikia au?
'Okay, didn't I hear it?'

Speaker A is reprimanding speaker B because she hasn't cleaned the table. Speaker B seems not to care about it as she just looks at her without talking. Speaker A decides to repeat what she was saying and speaker B interrupts speaker A by saying *sawa* with increasing the voice tone and adding emphasis to show that the speaker doesn't want to hear anymore what the other person is talking about. Also by saying *si nimesikia au?* ("Didn't I hear it?") means that she is not happy with that conversation so she uses *sawa* indirectly to stop the conversation. Speaker A seems to understand what speaker B means as she decides to stop talking. Therefore, the marker *sawa* here has been used to signal that *the speaker doesn't want to hear anymore what the other person is talking about*.

4. Conclusion

The preceding analysis examined the functions of the marker *sawa* in spoken Swahili. The findings reveal that *sawa* performs various functions depending on the context of use and specific conversational experiences. In this research I have underlined some interesting functions of the marker *sawa*: as a receipt marker, tag-positioned-comprehension check, tag-question used to check for understanding, continuer, negative releasing marker, gap filler, and quotative marker. It can be also used to make emphasis and gain attention, to signal whether things are equal or not equal, to signal acceptability (whether something is acceptable or not), to mark the transition from the state of not understanding to the state of understanding, to signal that everything is in good order or someone is in good health, to signal dissatisfaction, to mark ironic sense of "I will deal with you later", to signal that the speaker doesn't care ("I don't care"), to signal that the speaker doesn't want to hear anymore what the other speaker is talking about, to signal the sense of "no problem" and to signal the topic change. The results also show that, apart from relying on contextualization cues indicating what has been said before and after the PM *sawa*, also some paralinguistic features like gestures and intonation are among the contextualization cues that help to determine the functions of this marker. It would be certainly interesting if further research could focus on the marker *sawa* as used in other contexts in order to explore its more possible functions. It could also be worth investigating if there are any regional differences in the use of PM *sawa* and any possible codeswitching to replace it by English "OK" in some social contexts.

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Attachment

In the discussion we have used various symbols to show variation in the intonation of the PM *sawa* as proposed by Psathas and Anderson (1993):

SIGN	MEANING
Capital letters	Words that are spoken with an increase of loudness
:	Sound is prolonged
—	The underline shows stress
SAWA	Capital letter shows increase in loudness
<u>SAWA</u>	The word spoken with an increase of loudness and with stress.
,	Continuing intonation
? and ↑	Rising intonation
↓	Falling intonation
!	Exclamation