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A Comparative Study of Kiswahili Dialects: A Case of Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi from a Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the three dialects of Kiswahili, including Standard Kiswahili, spoken throughout Tanzania, and Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, spoken in Zanzibar, through a comparative linguistic analysis. The paper aims to examine the differences among the three dialects, addressing a gap in comparative research on their phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic features. Guided by the principles of historical linguistics and dialectology, the study applies a comparative method to selected phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic differences and similarities among the three dialects. This paper uses a qualitative comparative design and follows a synthetical approach. It combines field data collected directly from 12 L1 speakers with secondary data from the dictionaries of Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and guided elicitation. Verbal consent was sought from informants before data collection. The findings reveal that although all varieties share the same Bantu grammatical foundation, they differ in sound patterns, vocabulary, and morphosyntactic structures. Kitumbatu retains more conservative linguistic features, which may be associated with relative geographical isolation, while Kimakunduchi shows evidence of both internal development and external linguistic influences that make it more similar to Standard Kiswahili. Generally, dialectal variation in Zanzibar reflects broader historical and socio-cultural dynamics along the East African coast. By examining these three dialects comparatively, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of internal diversification within Kiswahili and highlights the importance of documenting local dialects for both academic inquiry and cultural preservation, and the broader study of historical and comparative linguistics.

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1. Introduction

Kiswahili is one of the major Bantu languages in the Niger–Congo family and is widely used as a common language of communication across East Africa, especially in Tanzania and Kenya^[1]. Even though Standard Kiswahili is used in schools, media, and official settings, the language itself is not uniform^[2]. Along the East African coast and on the islands of the Indian Ocean, people speak different local dialects, each shaped by its own history and identity^[3]. Some of these include Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu, and Kimakunduchi, which are spoken in Zanzibar but have not been studied as much as other varieties^[4,5].

The differences we see in these dialects are closely linked to the history of the people who speak them. The East African coast has, for many years, been a place of trade, migration, and cultural interaction, and these processes have influenced how Kiswahili developed over time^[1,6]. At the same time, factors like geographical separation and settlement patterns allowed some dialects to keep older features, while others changed through contact with different groups^[7]. Because of this, Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu, and Kimakunduchi show differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, even though they come from the same origin and belong to one language^[8].

This study compares these three varieties from a historical perspective to better understand how and why they are different. By looking at features such as sounds, word formation, vocabulary, and sentence structure, the study explains these differences in relation to historical and social factors. In doing so, it helps us better understand the diversity within Kiswahili and shows why it is important to recognize and preserve local dialects as part of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Swahili-speaking communities^[9].

Kiswahili, a major Bantu language spoken across East Africa, has developed over centuries along the coast through extensive contact with traders from Arabia, Persia, and later Europe. While the urban Zanzibar variety, Kiunguja, became the basis of Standard Kiswahili, many rural and island dialects have preserved distinct linguistic features shaped by their unique histories and social contexts. Among these,

Kitumbatu, spoken on Tumbatu Island in northern Zanzibar, and Kimakunduchi, spoken in the southern part of the island, stand out as dialects that reflect both shared Swahili roots and divergent local developments^[10].

Recent studies show that these dialects differ in meaningful ways. For example, Furumoto and Gibson^[11] found that Kimakunduchi displays distinctive patterns in verb tense, aspect, mood marking, and negation compared to Standard Swahili, highlighting how historical processes like isolation and contact influence grammatical structures. Ame^[12] notes that phonological features such as vowel changes in Kitumbatu contribute to its unique sound system, distinguishing it from neighbouring dialects while still reflecting the core Bantu grammar of Kiswahili. Kitumbatu is also reported to lack consonants that were borrowed by standard Kiswahili from Arabic including /s/, /θ/, /x/ and /ð/^[12], which shows the influence of language contact on the dialectal differences between Kitumbatu and Standard Kiswahili.

Although Kitumbatu has received less attention than Kimakunduchi, existing dictionaries and descriptive studies confirm that it is a clearly identifiable dialect with its own patterns of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar^[13]. Together, these studies demonstrate that the dialects of Zanzibar are not just variants of a standard language but are living records of the island's history, migration, and cultural interactions. Examining Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi comparatively allows researchers to trace these historical influences, deepen our understanding of Swahili's internal diversity, and contribute to the preservation of Zanzibar's linguistic heritage.

Although Kiswahili has been widely studied as a major Bantu language, most research has focused on its standardized form and the Kiunguja variety that forms its base. As a result, other important dialects spoken in rural areas of Zanzibar, such as Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, have received limited scholarly attention. While each of the two dialects has a dictionary, they lack a study that compares the two and each of them with standard Kiswahili, which is the focus of this paper. This lack of detailed study has created a gap in understanding how these dialects have developed

over time and how they contribute to the internal diversity of Kiswahili.

In particular, there has been little systematic comparative research examining Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi together from a historical perspective. It is therefore not clearly established whether the differences between them are due to the preservation of older Swahili features, internal linguistic changes, or external influences shaped by distinct historical experiences. Addressing this gap is necessary for a fuller understanding of Kiswahili dialect variation and the historical processes that have shaped language development in Zanzibar.

This paper examines the linguistic similarities and differences between Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi from a historical-comparative perspective. Specifically, it compares phonological and lexical features of Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, and identifies morphosyntactic differences between the three dialects. It also explains the observed similarities and differences in relation to historical processes.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars agree that Swahili dialects differ in clear and systematic ways. Research shows that variation appears in pronunciation (phonology), word formation (morphology), vocabulary (lexicon), and sentence structure (syntax). For example, Whiteley^[3] explains that although all Swahili dialects share the same Bantu foundation, they differ in their sound systems, choice of words, and some grammatical patterns. In the same way, Nurse and Hinnebusch^[1] argue that these differences developed over time because of historical changes and contact with other languages along the East African coast. They show that sound changes, borrowing of words, and small grammatical shifts are normal developments within the Swahili dialect continuum. This paper adds to the existing literature on the dialects of Kiswahili by comparing the three dialects of Standard Kiswahili, Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu. The phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic features of the three dialects will be compared to show the relatedness of the dialects in question.

Other scholars also support this view, including Maw^[9], who notes that even though Swahili dialects can generally understand one another, they still maintain unique pronuncia-

tion and vocabulary features. Harries^[6] documents regional differences and shows how trade and migration influenced the growth of coastal varieties. Earlier still, Ashton^[2] provides a detailed description of Standard Swahili grammar, which later researchers have used as a base for identifying how other dialects differ from the standard form. These foundational works help us see where dialects are similar and where they diverge. Their comparisons, however, do not take into account the historical perspectives that take them back to how they relate to the reconstructed Proto-Bantu terms, especially in pronunciation. This paper compares the three dialects synchronically and reflects on their relatedness to the reconstructed proto terms.

Studies that focus specifically on Zanzibar varieties further confirm that variation is systematic and meaningful. Mufwene^[7] explains that language patterns in coastal communities are shaped by contact, movement of people, and social interaction. Hurskainen^[14] examines speech varieties of Kiswahili in the coastal area of Tanzania and the nearby islands of the Indian Ocean. He identifies differences in pronunciation and vocabulary between rural and urban varieties and argues that the speech variety of Zanzibar town is considered to be the standard form of Kiswahili while others are taken as dialects. More recently, Furumoto and Gibson^[11] show that Kimakunduchi differs from Standard Swahili in verbal morphology, especially in tense-aspect marking and the use of auxiliary verbs. Their findings demonstrate that even within Zanzibar, dialects display detailed grammatical differences. Their studies, however, do not address the three dialects of Standard Kiswahili, Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu in a single study. The present studies also do not compare the dialects based on a wide range of aspects like phonology, morphology and syntax. Thus, this paper presents a comprehensive comparison which integrates historical and synchronic aspects.

Broader comparative studies of Bantu languages also strengthen this understanding. Heine and Nurse^[8] explain that similarities and differences among closely related varieties can be understood through structural comparison and contact-induced change. They emphasize that careful comparison, particularly at the phonological and morphological levels, is essential for explaining relationships among related languages and dialects. This paper reacts to their suggestion by presenting a comparative analysis of the three dialects

taking into account syntax in addition to phonology and morphology.

Despite this wide range of research, there is still limited detailed comparative work that directly examines Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi across all major linguistic levels. Many studies discuss Swahili dialects generally or focus on only one variety at a time. There exists less comparative research between the three dialects despite the presence of studies on individual dialects. Therefore, the present study builds on earlier dialectological and comparative research by providing a systematic comparison of Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi at phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels, which previous studies did not address. In doing so, it aims to fill the existing gap and contribute to a clearer understanding of the relationship between these three Zanzibar dialects.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Typological Theory, an approach in linguistics that compares languages based on their structural features. The roots of this approach can be traced back to Wilhelm von Humboldt^[15], who argued that languages differ in structure but follow general patterns. However, Typological Theory was more clearly developed in the 20th century by Joseph Greenberg^[16], who introduced the idea of language universals. Greenberg^[16] showed that languages around the world share recurring structural patterns, especially in word order, morphology, and phonology. His work demonstrated that languages can be systematically compared in order to identify similarities and differences. The evidence of structural comparisons among the three dialects makes the application of this theory important in comparing the three dialects, which belong to one language and one typological group of agglutinating languages. The paper discusses the phonological, morphological and syntactic similarities and differences among the three dialects.

The main idea of Typological Theory is that languages can be classified according to observable features such as sound systems, word formation patterns, and sentence structure^[16]. It focuses on structural comparison rather than historical origin. In this paper, the theory provides a clear framework for comparing the phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic features of Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi. By examining these linguistic levels, the study identifies how the three dialects are similar and how

they differ in their structural organization. Therefore, Typological Theory offers a practical and systematic foundation for analysing the relationship between the three dialects.

Being historical and comparative, this paper applies a comparative approach in which structural patterns of the three dialects are compared. Historical and comparative linguistics takes into account the synchronic typological features of different language varieties to account for earlier terms. The genetic relatedness between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and several other languages was proposed by Sir William Jones (1746–1794). This was followed by Franz Bopp (1791–1867) among others who used the correspondences between verbal systems of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and other Indo-European languages to prove their genetic relatedness. He used the comparative method which is also applied in the reconstruction of proto terms in this paper. Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) also established the sound correspondences between the sounds of Germanic and those of other Indo European languages. He established the sound change law referred to as Grimm's Law which outlines how Proto-Indo-European stops developed in Proto-Germanic: voiceless stops became voiceless fricatives, voiced stops became voiceless stops, and voiced aspirated stops became voiced fricatives, which later often became voiced stops. Grimm illustrated this mainly using Latin and Greek. This comparative account of different languages suggests the integration of the typological theory and comparative approach. The typological similarities and differences are accounted for by comparing the structural patterns of languages/dialects as done in this paper.

3. Materials and Methods

This paper uses a qualitative comparative design and follows a synthetic approach to bring different sources of information together in a clear and organized way. It combines field data collected directly from native speakers and through phone calls, and secondary data collected from the dictionaries of Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi^[17,18] with existing academic literature in order to produce a well-balanced comparison. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and guided elicitation, which helped the researchers to capture real examples of pronunciation, word formation, vocabulary, and sentence structure. Semi-structured interviews

involved asking the informants to provide the translations of selected structures in each of the three dialects. The data from one informant were used on the other from a different dialect. 12 participants were involved (4 from each dialect). This sample is appropriate as the study is homogeneous. The participants were selected through convenience sampling, in which the available qualified and willing informants were selected. The criteria for selection involved being an L1 speaker who lives among other native speakers and is not influenced much by external contacts. The informants' ages ranged from 45 years and above. The participants were guided to narrate some stories and engage in some conversations from which the researchers collected the required data. All recordings were made with participants' consent, then carefully transcribed and arranged according to linguistic levels to make comparison easier and more systematic.

At the same time, the study reviewed books, journal articles, and previous research on Swahili dialects and Bantu linguistics. This helped to place the field findings within a wider scholarly context and to confirm or clarify patterns observed in the data. The linguistic features of Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi are examined side by side, and their similarities and differences are clearly identified and interpreted using Typological Theory and a comparative approach. The collected data are compared across all three dialects to see the similarities and differences, which are thematically analysed and tabled. The morphosyntactic comparisons are analysed through morphological parsing and tabulations. By combining field evidence with academic

research, the study presents a clear, reliable, and academically sound comparison of the three dialects.

To adhere to research ethics, I acquired a research permit (DRICE3/2026) from the Directorate of Research, Innovation, and Community Engagement (DRICE) of the Saint Augustine University of Tanzania. Also, each informant was informed verbally of the objectives of the study and asked to freely participate in the process of data collection, which they all accepted. Verbal consent was sought from all 12 informants involved in the study. Verbal consent was preferred because the informants could not read or write.

4. Results

In this paper, a comparison of Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi across four major linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax, is guided by a Typological Comparative framework. Each level is examined side by side in order to identify similarities, differences, and patterns of variation.

4.1. Phonological Features of Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi

The phonological level provides important insights into how Kitumbatu, Kimakunduchi and Standard Kiswahili differ and overlap. This section examines phonological elements such as deletion, assimilation and insertion. It was found that the three varieties of Kiswahili differ in phonological features. The features are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Phonological Differences.

Kitumbatu	Kimakunduchi	Standard Kiswahili	Gloss
<i>nulya</i>	<i>winua</i>	<i>inua</i>	lift up/raise
<i>uvi</i>	<i>uvwi</i>	<i>Mvi</i>	grey hair
<i>pulya</i>	<i>wepua</i>	<i>ipua</i>	remove (from the fire)
<i>ezeka</i>	<i>wezeka</i>	<i>ezeka</i>	thatch (a roof)
<i>kwelya</i>	<i>kwea</i>	<i>kwea</i>	climb/plant
<i>pulya</i>	<i>Pua</i>	<i>pua</i>	nose
<i>valya</i>	<i>vwaa</i>	<i>vaa</i>	wear
<i>bomolya</i>	<i>bomoa</i>	<i>bomoa</i>	demolish
<i>lyamka</i>	<i>lamku</i>	<i>amka</i>	wake up
<i>lyaga</i>	<i>Laga</i>	<i>aga</i>	say goodbye
<i>gani</i>	<i>Jani</i>	<i>jani</i>	leaf
<i>njuwa</i>	<i>njiwa</i>	<i>njiwa</i>	pigeon/dove
<i>penya</i>	<i>venya</i>	<i>penya</i>	pass through/penetrate
<i>tikisa</i>	<i>tikisha</i>	<i>tikisa</i>	shake
<i>twisa</i>	<i>twisha</i>	<i>twisha</i>	load (onto)
<i>kusanya</i>	<i>kushana</i>	<i>kusanya</i>	collect/gather
<i>mshwale</i>	<i>mshale</i>	<i>mshale</i>	arrow

The data in **Table 1** presents a number of phonological differences among the three varieties of Kiswahili. The differences and similarities are discussed hereunder.

4.1.1. Insertion

Insertion (epenthesis) is the addition of a sound to a word that was not originally there. This usually happens to make pronunciation easier or smoother. For example, a language may insert a vowel between two consonants if the cluster is difficult to pronounce. Epenthesis is a common phonological process that helps adjust words to fit the sound patterns of a language^[19]. In the same way, Hyman^[20] explains that insertion happens because languages follow spe-

cific sound rules, and sometimes adding a sound makes a word easier to pronounce^[20]. This phonological process is found mainly in Kimatunduchi and Kitumabatu dialects of Kiswahili.

• Insertion of /ly/ in Kitumbatu

Kitumbatu speakers pronounce the sound /ly/ in words that contain the vowels /a/, /o/, and /u/. The insertion of this sound occurs in some words where the vowel may appear at the beginning, in the middle, or even at the end of the word. However, this feature does not occur in Kimakunduchi and Standard Kiswahili pronunciation as seen in the examples in **Table 2**.

Table 2. /ly/ Insertion in Kitumbatu.

Kitumbatu	Kimakunduchi	Standard Kiswahili	Gloss
<i>lyubavu</i>	<i>ubavu</i>	<i>ubavu</i>	rib
<i>lyamka</i>	<i>lamka</i>	<i>amka</i>	wake up
<i>lyaga</i>	<i>Laga</i>	<i>aga</i>	say goodbye
<i>telelya</i>	<i>telea</i>	<i>Teleza</i>	slide/slip
<i>kwelya</i>	<i>kwea</i>	<i>kwea</i>	climb
<i>kondolyo</i>	<i>kondoo</i>	<i>kondoo</i>	sheep
<i>mjukulyu</i>	<i>mjukuu</i>	<i>mjukuu</i>	grandchild
<i>vulya</i>	<i>vua</i>	<i>vua</i>	remove/take off
<i>pulya</i>	<i>pua</i>	<i>pua</i>	nose
<i>mlyume</i>	<i>mume</i>	<i>mume</i>	husband
<i>kalyanga</i>	<i>kaanga</i>	<i>kaanga</i>	fry

The insertion of /ly/ in words containing the vowel sequence ‘a’, ‘o’, and ‘u’ in Kitumbatu does not occur in either Standard Kiswahili or Kimakunduchi. One instance of the insertion of /ly/ is insertion at the beginning of a word starting with a vowel. Kitumbatu does not allow vowels at the beginning of a word, leading to the insertion of /ly/ in *lyubavu* ‘rib’, *lyamka* ‘wake up’ and *lyaga* ‘bid farewell’ which in Kiswahili are *ubavu*, *amka* and *aga* respectively. The other examples include *lyokota* ‘pick up/collect’ and *lyamkia* ‘greet’ which in Standard Kiswahili are *okota* and *amkia* respectively. In Proto-Bantu, most of these terms have the initial /d/ as in **damuka* ‘wake up’, **daga* ‘big farewell’. Also, some words starting with vowels in Standard Kiswahili were reconstructed by Guthrie^[21] as starting with /y/ as in **yig-* ‘imitate’, which in Standard Kiswahili is *iga*, **yinuk* ‘raise’ in Standard Kiswahili *‘inuka’* **yog-* ‘birth’ in Standard Kiswahili *oga*, and *yopup-* ‘fear’ in Standard Kiswahili *ogopa*. Thus, from the historical comparative view, we can say that while Standard Kiswahili deletes the initial

consonants /d/ and /y/, Kitumbatu inserts /l/ before **y/* in the words whose proto terms start with /y/ and changes the Proto Bantu /d/ into /l/ and palatalizes the changed /l/ into /ly/ in the words whose proto forms start with /d/. This makes all the words with vowels in the initial position have /ly/ as the initial consonant. The change from **d/* to *l/* is evidenced by the terms *lamka* ‘wake up’ and *laga* ‘bid farewell’ in Kimakunduchi, whose proto terms are **damuka* and **daga* respectively.

The other insertions of /ly/ occur between two consecutive vowels in Standard Kiswahili and Kimakunduchi. This shows that in addition to not allowing vowels at the beginning of the word, Kitumbatu disallows a vowel sequence. In words with two consecutive vowels in Standard Kiswahili and Kimakunduchi, Kitumbatu inserts /ly/ to separate the two, as in *kwelya* ‘climb’, *kondoyo* ‘ship’, *vulya* ‘remove/take off’ *pulya* ‘nose’ which in Kimakunduchi and Kiswahili are *kwea*, *kandoo*, *vua* and *pua* respectively. While the examples above show the insertion of /ly/ between the two vowels at the end

of the word, insertions in consecutive vowels in the middle of the words are experienced as in *Kalyanga* ‘fry’ which in Kimakunduchi and Kiswahili is *kaanga*. Such insertions present the uniqueness of Kitumbatu compared to the other two dialects. In Guthrie’s^[21] reconstructed terms, most of the terms starting with and those with consecutive vowels in Standard Kiswahili reflect the insertion of /ly/ at word initial and consecutive vowels. As argued earlier, mostly the Proto-Bantu/d/ is deleted in Standard Kiswahili but changed

into /ly/ in Kitumbatu, and to // at word-initial position in Kimakunduchi.

• Insertion of // in Kimakunduchi

In Kimakunduchi, the sound // is inserted in some words that begin with the vowel /a/, which appears at the beginning of the word in Standard Swahili. This does not seem to affect words starting with other vowels like *u-* in *ubavu* ‘rib’ and *uvwi* ‘grey hair’. The examples are presented in (1).

(1)	Kimakunduchi	Standard Kiswahili	Gloss
	<i>Lamka</i>	<i>amka</i>	wake up
	<i>Laga</i>	<i>aga</i>	say goodbye
	<i>Lagua</i>	<i>agua</i>	make divinations
	<i>Lagano</i>	<i>agano</i>	covenant

From the examples in (1), we see that the lateral sound //, which is a lateral consonant, is inserted by Kimakunduchi speakers in the words which in Standard Kiswahili start with the vowel /a/. However, when comparing the feature to Guthrie’s^[21] reconstructed Proto Bantu terms, deletion has taken place in Standard Kiswahili. Thus, it is Standard Kiswahili that has undergone deletion of //, which is reconstructed as /d/ as in the proto terms **damuk-* ‘wake up’, **dagano* ‘covenant’, **dag-* ‘bid farewell’, and *dagud-* ‘make divinations’, which in many Bantu languages is replaced by // which may be the case in Kimakunduchi. Since the combination is synchronic, the suggestion that // is inserted in Kimakunduchi compared to Standard Kiswahili is proper. From the historical perspective, Kimakunduchi is closer to Proto Bantu than Standard Kiswahili.

• Insertion of /w/ in Kimakunduchi

In addition, Kimakunduchi also inserts the glide sound

/w/ in words that begin with the vowels /a/, /e/, /i/, and /o/ when these vowels occur at the beginning of a word. This can be seen in the example in **Table 3**.

From these examples, we see that the sound /w/, which is a labial glide, is inserted by Kimakunduchi speakers in certain words. However, Kiswahili speakers pronounce those same words without inserting this glide, as shown in the examples above. In Guthrie’s^[21] reconstruction, there is evidence of the change from /y/ to /w/ as in **yambo* ‘bait’, which changed to *wambo* in Sukuma (F21), *fwambo* in Manyika (S13a), and **yambuk* ‘cross over’, which is *wambuka* in Manyika (S13a). This shows the possibility that the words in which /w/ is found in Kimakunduchi result from the change of a proto-palatal glide /y/ into a bilabial glide /w/, which in Standard Kiswahili is deleted. The deletion of /y/ at the beginning of a word in Kiswahili is evidenced in words **yanika* ‘hang to dry’, *yunga* ‘flour’, *yunuka* ‘raise’, which in Standard Kiswahili are *anika*, *unga* and *inuka* respectively.

Table 3. /w/ Insertion in Kimakunduchi.

Kimakunduchi	Kiswhili	Gloss
<i>Wokota</i>	<i>okota</i>	pick up/collect
<i>Wezeka</i>	<i>ezeka</i>	thatch
<i>Wamkia</i>	<i>amkia</i>	greet
<i>Wepua</i>	<i>epua</i>	remove (from fire)
<i>Winua</i>	<i>inua</i>	lift/raise
<i>Wanika</i>	<i>anika</i>	hang out (clothes) to dry
<i>Winga</i>	<i>inga</i>	shoo away
<i>Wezua</i>	<i>ezua</i>	invent

Nevertheless, not all words that begin with /e/, /i/, and /o/ in Standard Swahili take the inserted /w/ in Kimakunduchi. There are also words that begin with vowels but do not undergo /w/ insertion, such as *ongeza* ‘increase’, *oa* ‘marry’, *embe* ‘mango’, and *ini* ‘liver’. The presence or absence of /w/ in a word depends on the proto-form of the word in question, as argued above.

The other instance of /w/ insertion in Kimakunduchi was found after the labio-dental fricatives /f/ or /v/. In instances where a fricative is followed by a vowel (/a/, /e/, /i/, /o/) in Standard Kiswahili, the bilabial glide /w/ is inserted between the fricative and the vowel, as shown in some of the examples in **Table 4**.

The examples in **Table 4** show that Kimakunduchi has

a tendency to insert the sound /w/, which is a glide, when it is preceded by /f/ or /v/, both of which are labiodental fricatives. This is not found in Kitumbatu and Kiswahili.

At the same time, there are also words in Kimakunduchi that contain /f/ and /v/ but do not undergo /w/ insertion, such as *fuja* ‘waste/spoil’, *fukua* ‘dig up’, *finika* ‘cover’, *fua* ‘wash’, *vimba* ‘swell’, *vunda* ‘rot’, *vuta* ‘pull/smoke’, and *vuka* ‘cross’. It was found that /w/ is not inserted when the vowel following the fricative is /u/, and when the high vowel /i/ follows the fricative and is followed by another consonant sound as in *finika* ‘cover’ (followed by /n/), and in *vimba* ‘swell’ (followed by /m/). Therefore, /w/ is inserted when #fi# or #vi# are final syllables in Standard Kiswahili and Kitumbatu. This adds to the fact that language change is regular.

Table 4. /w/ Insertion between Labial Dental Fricatives and Vowels.

Kimakunduchi	Kiswahili	Gloss
<i>Kiwaywi</i>	<i>kiwavi</i>	caterpillar
<i>Kifwafwa</i>	<i>kifafa</i>	epilepsy
<i>Vwaa</i>	<i>vaa</i>	wear
<i>Uvwi</i>	<i>uvi</i>	bee
<i>Fwaka</i>	<i>foka</i>	shout angrily/burst out in anger
<i>Ivwa</i>	<i>iva</i>	ripe

4.1.2. Fricativisation and Voicing in Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi

Fricativisation is a phonological process in which a sound which is not a fricative becomes a fricative. The three dialects differ in the presentation of consonants. The voice-

less bilabial plosive /p/ in Standard Swahili is pronounced as a voiced labial dental fricative /v/ in some Kimakunduchi words. This involves two processes of fricativisation and voicing in which the voiceless bilabial plosive is voiced and fricativised. The evidence is reflected in the data in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Fricativisation in Kimakunduchi.

Kimakunduchi	Standard Kiswahili	Gloss
<i>Vita</i>	<i>pita</i>	pass/go through
<i>Venya</i>	<i>penya</i>	penetrate
<i>Mvisi</i>	<i>mpishi</i>	cook/chef
<i>Vuliza</i>	<i>puliza</i>	blow
<i>Vika</i>	<i>pika</i>	cook

In these examples, we see that the voiceless bilabial stop /p/ in Standard Swahili is pronounced as the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ in Kimakunduchi. However, this substitution occurs only in certain words, because the dialect also includes words where /p/ is pronounced just like in Standard Swahili. This indicates that Kimakunduchi has both /p/ and /v/, but in specific contexts, it uses /v/ where Standard Swahili has /p/. For instance, words such as *pinga* ‘refuse/op-

pose’, *paka* ‘cat/smear’, *pamba* ‘cotton’, *pakia* ‘load/pack’, *punguza* ‘reduce/decrease’, *pwaga* ‘sprinkle/scatter’, *ponda* ‘pound/crush’, and *tapika* ‘vomit’ illustrate the contexts where /p/ is retained in Kimakunduchi. These examples confirm that Kimakunduchi speakers do not follow a fixed rule for changing /p/ to /v/ but rather reflect the natural patterns of their dialect, where some words use /v/ and others retain /p/, similar to Standard Swahili.

• **The Change of the Sound /j/ in Standard Swahili to /g/ in Kitumbatu**

The sound /j/ in Standard Swahili is pronounced as /g/ in some Kitumbatu words. A voiced palatal plosive /j/, also classified as a voiced palatal affricate /dʒ/, is depalatalised into a voiced velar plosive /g/ in Kitumbatu. This feature is not found in Standard Kiswahili and Kimakunduchi. This was found in three words including *gino* ‘tooth’ which in Standard Kiswahili is *jino*, *shemegi* ‘sister/brother-in-law’ *shemeji* in Standard Kiswahili, and *gani* ‘leaf’ which in Standard Kiswahili is *jani*.

According to these examples, it is clear that Kitumbatu pronounces /g/, which is a voiced velar stop, whereas in Standard Swahili the corresponding sound is /j/, a voiced palatal stop. This, however, is not found in many words as we found only two. In some Kitumbatu words, /j/ does not change to /g/; instead, it is pronounced the same way

as in Standard Kiswahili. Examples of such words include *jembe* ‘hoe’, *jongoo* ‘gecko’, *jimbi* ‘type of fish’, *jivu* ‘ash’, and *jibwe* ‘stone’. These examples show that in Kitumbatu dialect, the sound /j/ is sometimes pronounced as /j/ (without any change), just like in Standard Swahili. This indicates that there are no specific phonological conditions triggering a change between /g/ and /j/; the variation is simply a natural characteristic of specific words in the Kitumbatu dialect.

• **The change of the sounds /f/ and /s/ in Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu**

There is a variation in the pronunciation of the voiceless fricative sounds /f/ and /s/ in certain words among Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi speakers. Kimakunduchi speakers pronounce the voiceless palatal fricative /f/, whereas Kitumbatu speakers pronounce the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/, which in Standard Kiswahili takes /s/ in some and /f/ in others. The examples are presented in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Differences in the Pronunciation of the Sounds /s/ and /f/.

Kitumbatu	Kimakunduchi	Gloss
<i>Tikisa</i>	<i>tikisha</i>	shake
<i>Twisa</i>	<i>twisha</i>	load (onto)
<i>Kusanya</i>	<i>kushanya</i>	collect
<i>Shikio</i>	<i>shikio</i>	ear

The examples above show that in Kitumbatu, the sound /f/ (in Kimakunduchi), which is a voiceless palatal fricative, is pronounced as /s/, a voiceless alveolar fricative. However, in Standard Kiswahili, this sound is pronounced as /s/ in *tikisa* and *kusanya*, just as in Kitumbatu, with /f/ in *twisha* as in Kimakunduchi. Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu use /f/ in *shikio* ‘ear’ which in Standard Kiswahili is *sikio*.

All three dialects have the sounds /f/ and /s/. In some Kitumbatu words, /f/ is realized as /s/, as illustrated above. At the same time, in certain words in both Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, the sound /f/ is pronounced without any change. Examples of words containing /f/ in both dialects include *shona* ‘sew’, *washa* ‘switch on’, *shoka* ‘axe’, *mshenga* ‘wedding negotiator’ and *shemeji* ‘brother-in-law/sister-in-law’ which in Standard Kiswahili are pronounced with the same sound.

The examples presented above clearly show that both Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi pronounce the sound /f/ in certain words. They also demonstrate that Kimakunduchi has the sound /s/ in some words, as shown in *sikia* ‘hear’, *pasua* ‘split/tear’, *sogea* ‘closer’, *sugua* ‘rub/scrub’, *songa*

‘move forward/push forward’ and *sizia* ‘doze/nap’ which also in Standard Kiswahili are pronounced with /s/.

4.1.3. Deletion of /n/ and /m/ in Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi Dialects

Deletion is a normal process in language where certain sounds are skipped without changing the meaning of the word^[19]. In Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi dialects, there is deletion of the alveolar nasal /n/ when it is preceded by the sound /z/. It also deletes the bilabial nasal /m/ when it is preceded by the sound /v/, as illustrated in **Table 7**.

In these examples, we see that words containing the alveolar nasal /n/ and bilabial nasal /m/ in Standard Kiswahili undergo deletion in Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi when they are preceded by the voiced alveolar fricative /z/ and voiced labiodental fricative /v/ respectively. Thus, in the two varieties, the consonant cluster between the nasals and voiced alveolar and labiodental fricatives is not possible. Where a Standard Kiswahili word contains a nasal onset /nz/ or /mv/, Kitumbantu and Kimakunduchi report /z/ and /v/.

Generally, the three dialects of Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, belong to the same language, Kiswahili. They differ in certain sounds but they still show deep similarities which evidence their belonging to the same

language. Historically and linguistically, the three branch from Kiswahili as it branches from Bantu. This is evidenced by the phonological similarities of the terms to those reconstructed by Guthrie^[21].

Table 7. Deletion of /n/ and /m/.

Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi	Kiswahili	Gloss
<i>Pazi</i>	<i>panzi</i>	grasshopper
<i>Sizia</i>	<i>sinzia</i>	doze/nap
<i>Zi</i>	<i>nzi</i>	fly (the insect)
<i>Vulya</i>	<i>mvua</i>	rain
<i>Javi</i>	<i>jamvi</i>	woven mat
<i>Uvi/uvwi</i>	<i>mvi</i>	grey hair

4.2. Lexical Similarities and Differences

Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu are recognized as dialects of Kiswahili according to scholars who have classified Kiswahili dialects. Studies by Kipacha^[4], Stigand^[5], and Nurse and Spear^[22] identify these varieties as part of the wider Kiswahili dialect continuum. Their classifications are based on structural, geographical, and historical criteria, demonstrating that although these varieties share a common Swahili foundation, they exhibit distinct lexical features that justify their recognition as separate dialects within the Kiswahili language. This section shows that some lexical items in these dialects are similar, while others differ.

4.2.1. Vocabulary Differences among the Three Varieties

In some instances, each of the 3 varieties exhibits different lexical items for the same thing. This shows that, though they belong to the same language, they differ in some ways,

including their lexical items. The lexical differences among them are presented in **Table 8**.

The data in **Table 8** show that Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi differ significantly at the lexical level, even when both refer to the same item. In many cases, the dialects use completely different lexical items from each other. The variation is lexical replacement, not just phonological modification. This suggests that all the dialects preserve older or localized vocabulary that differs from Standard Swahili and from each other. Kitumbatu in particular shows many forms ending in *-lya* (e.g., *tongolya*, *chukulya*, *nulya*), which may reflect internal morphological patterns specific to that dialect and the phonological feature of inserting /ly/.

Lexical differences among dialects are expected due to geographical differences and possibly historical encounters of language contact. Dialects of the same language diverge structurally including acquiring new lexical items. The differences may result from language contact or geographical differences.

Table 8. The Differences in Lexical Items.

Kitumbatu	Kimakunduchi	Standard Swahili	Gloss
<i>tongolya</i>	<i>chowea</i>	<i>sema</i>	say/speak
<i>taka</i>	<i>kaza/chaka</i>	<i>penda</i>	love
<i>kweza</i>	<i>Wapa</i>	<i>tafuta</i>	look for/search
<i>chukulya</i>	<i>weleka</i>	<i>beba</i>	carry
<i>kuta</i>	<i>Miza</i>	<i>penga</i>	avoid/keep away from
<i>kaanang'ombe</i>	<i>kongong'ombe</i>	<i>yangeyange</i>	cattle egret
<i>dundumoto</i>	<i>Chaki</i>	<i>majimoto</i>	drosophila species
<i>malele</i>	<i>kimbaumbau</i>	<i>kinyonga</i>	Chameleon
<i>jototo</i>	<i>tuvwituwvi</i>	<i>lengelage</i>	blister
<i>nyewana</i>	<i>mwangu</i>	<i>nyembamba</i>	thin/narrow
<i>finga</i>	<i>Finika</i>	<i>funika</i>	cover

4.2.2. Similarities between Kimakunduchi and Standard Kiswahili

It was found from the field that, despite the differences among the three. There are similarities between one dialect and the other. For instance, Kimakunduchi exhibits some lexical similarities with Standard Kiswahili. Some of these similarities are presented in **Table 9**.

The data in **Table 9** show that Kimakunduchi and Standard Swahili are very closely related, since all the words listed are exactly the same in both form and meaning. These are just a few instances of similarities. The examples include body parts like *kichwa* ‘head’ and *shikio* ‘ear’, health terms like *homa* ‘fever’ and *kikohozi* ‘cough’, and common everyday actions such as *soma* ‘read’, *lala* ‘lie down’, *cheka* ‘laugh’, and *kamata* ‘catch’. There are no noticeable spelling

or pronunciation differences in these words except in *shikio* in Kimakunduchi, which in Standard Kiswahili is *sikio*. This suggests that Kimakunduchi preserves a large amount of core Kiswahili vocabulary. Overall, the strong similarity in basic words shows that Kimakunduchi and Standard Swahili are highly mutually intelligible and linguistically very close.

4.2.3. Lexical Similarities between Kitumbatu and Standard Kiswahili

The two dialects of Kitumbatu and Standard Kiswahili show similarities. Being the most spoken dialect of Kiswahili, Standard Kiswahili shares features with Kitumbatu which connects them as members of one big language which is Kiswahili. The similarities of the two are presented in **Table 10**.

Table 9. Words That Are Similar in Kiswahili and Kimakunduchi Dialect.

Kimakunduchi	Standard Swahili	Gloss
<i>Kichwa</i>	<i>kichwa</i>	head
<i>Kiganja</i>	<i>kiganja</i>	hand/palm (of the hand)
<i>Shikio</i>	<i>sikio</i>	ear
<i>Kikohozi</i>	<i>kikohozi</i>	cough
<i>Kidonda</i>	<i>kidonda</i>	wound/sore
<i>Homa</i>	<i>homa</i>	fever
<i>Konyeza</i>	<i>konyeza</i>	squeeze/press
<i>Chana</i>	<i>chana</i>	comb (hair)
<i>Vunjajungu</i>	<i>vunjajungu</i>	snail
<i>Tengeneza</i>	<i>tengeneza</i>	make/repair/fix
<i>Fukua</i>	<i>fukua</i>	dig up
<i>Vuja</i>	<i>vuja</i>	leak
<i>Zimia</i>	<i>zimia</i>	faint/lose consciousness
<i>Kunguni</i>	<i>kunguni</i>	bedbug
<i>lea</i>	<i>lea</i>	raise/bring up (a child)

Table 10. Similarities between Kitumbatu and Standard Kiswahili.

Kitumbatu	Standard Swahili	Gloss
<i>pinga</i>	<i>pinga</i>	refuse/oppose
<i>lima</i>	<i>lima</i>	cultivate/farm
<i>shona</i>	<i>shona</i>	sew
<i>danganya</i>	<i>danganya</i>	deceive/trick
<i>sikia</i>	<i>sikia</i>	hear
<i>vuja</i>	<i>vuja</i>	leak
<i>Chuna</i>	<i>chuna</i>	peel/skin
<i>changanya</i>	<i>changanya</i>	mix
<i>chimba</i>	<i>chimba</i>	dig
<i>choka</i>	<i>choka</i>	get tired
<i>chinja</i>	<i>chinja</i>	slaughter
<i>choma</i>	<i>choma</i>	burn/roast/stab
<i>chonga</i>	<i>chonga</i>	Carve
<i>chunga</i>	<i>chunga</i>	take care of/herd
<i>didimia</i>	<i>didimia</i>	sink

The data show that Kitumbatu and Standard Swahili are very closely related because all the words listed are exactly the same in both form and meaning. Most of them are common verbs like *pinga*, *lima*, *shona*, *sikia*, *chimba*, *choma*, and *gonga*, which describe everyday actions. There are no spelling or pronunciation differences in these examples. This shows that Kitumbatu keeps many basic Standard Swahili words without changing them. Generally, the strong similarity in these common verbs suggests a close linguistic

relationship and high mutual understanding between Kitumbatu and Standard Swahili.

4.2.4. Lexical Similarities between Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi

The two dialects of Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi differ in many ways as discussed above. However, they also show similarities that reflect their belonging to the same language. **Table 11** presents some of the lexical items which assimilate the two dialects.

Table 11. Words That Are Similar in Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi Dialects.

Kitumbatu	Kimakunduchi	Standard Swahili	Gloss
<i>umia</i>	<i>Umia</i>	<i>mafua</i>	flu/cold
<i>mno</i>	<i>Mno</i>	<i>humu</i>	here in/within
<i>kino</i>	<i>Kino</i>	<i>hiki</i>	this
<i>chi</i>	<i>chi</i>	<i>ardhi</i>	land/earth
<i>mosi</i>	<i>mosi</i>	<i>moshi</i>	smoke
<i>jibwe</i>	<i>jibwe</i>	<i>jiwe</i>	stone
<i>singo</i>	<i>singo</i>	<i>shingo</i>	neck
<i>dicho</i>	<i>dicho</i>	<i>jicho</i>	eye
<i>kibuno</i>	<i>chuno/kibuno</i>	<i>kiuno</i>	waist
<i>mnyongo</i>	<i>mnyongo</i>	<i>mgongo</i>	back
<i>nywili</i>	<i>nywili</i>	<i>nywele</i>	hair
<i>vi/kongwe</i>	<i>kongwe</i>	<i>mvi</i>	grey hair
<i>kilevu</i>	<i>kilevu</i>	<i>kidevu</i>	chin/beard
<i>javi</i>	<i>javi</i>	<i>jamvi</i>	mat (woven floor mat)
<i>tanu</i>	<i>tanu</i>	<i>mkungu</i>	clay lid

Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi are very closely related dialects because they share many words, especially in basic vocabulary. They also show the same sound changes, such as replacing certain consonants in similar ways. In many cases, both dialects use forms that differ from Standard Swahili but match each other, showing shared historical development. Generally, the strong lexical and phonological similarities confirm that the two dialects are closely connected within the Swahili dialect group.

4.3. Morphosyntactic Differences

4.3.1. Negation and the Loss of Present Tense Marker in Standard Kiswahili

Morphosyntactic differences refer to grammatical differences in tense, aspect, mood, and verb marking. Although Standard Swahili, Kimakunduchi, and Kitumbatu share a similar sentence structure, they differ in how they express tense and aspect. For example, Standard Kiswahili uses *-i* in the present negative, while Kimakunduchi keeps *na-* and

ends with *-a*. They also differ in past and future tense marking, with each variety using different TAM markers. These differences show that the variation between them is not only lexical or phonological, but also grammatical. This contrast is exemplified in (2).

(2) Standard Swahili

- (a) *Tunaimba*
Tu-na-imb-a
 2PL-Prs-sing-FV
 ‘We are singing./We sing.’
- (b) *Hatuimbi*
Ha-tu-imb-i
 Neg-2PL-sing-FV
 ‘We are not singing./We do not sing.’

Kimakunduchi

- (c) *Tunaimba*
Tu-na-imb-a
 2PL-Prs-sing-FV
 ‘We are singing./We sing.’

- (d) *Hatunaimba*
Ha-tu-na-imb-a
 Neg-2PL-Prs-sing-FV
 ‘We are not singing./We do not sing.’

The differences in the TAM system in the examples in (2) suggest the presence of micro-variation in addition to lexical and prosodic differences in terms of broader morphosyntactic features. Micro-variation refers to the fine-grained variation between closely related languages or language varieties. While in Standard Kiswahili, present tense negative forms change the final vowel to *-i*, Kimatunduchi maintains

the present tense morpheme *-na-*.

4.3.2. The Tense, Aspect and Mood System in the Three Dialects

Kimakunduchi and Standard Kiswahili differ in how they mark the Tense, Aspect, and Mood (TAM), which are marked by verbal prefix and/or the final vowel. The Final Vowel (FV) changes according to tense, aspect, or mood information. This occurs differently in the dialects in question. The TAM inflectional morphemes in each of the dialects are listed below:

Standard Kiswahili

TAM prefixes (with the final vowel *-a*)

Present/imperfective: *-na-*, habitual: *hu-*

Perfective: *-me-*, perfect (negative): *ja-*, past (positive): *li-*, past (negative): *ku-*

Future (positive): *-ta-*, future (negative): *ha-*, future (1st person singular negative): *si*

Conditional: *-ki-*, consecutive: *ka-*

Counterfactual: *-nge-/ngali-*

The final vowels

Default: *-a*:

Present (negative): *-i*:

Subjunctive: *-e*

Kimakunduchi

TAM prefixes (with the final vowel *-a*)

Imperfective *-na-*, habitual: *hu-*

Perfect: *-me-*, perfect (negative): *ja-*

Perfective: *Ø-*, perfective (negative): *li-*, perfective (relative clause): *a-*

Future: *-cha-*

Conditional/consecutive: *-ka-*

Counterfactual: *-nge-*

The final vowel

Default: *-a*

Perfective/future (negative): vowel copy

Subjunctive: *-e*

The differences in tense markings and final vowels reflect the dialectal differences that may occur in the same language. In the discussion below, we discuss the morphemes used for the present, which include *-na-* and *-hu-*, anterior morphemes, which include the past *-li-*, perfective */Ø-/*vowel copy, and perfective *me-*, while the future includes *ta-* and *cha-*. On the other hand, conditional/consecutive mood uses *ki-* and *ka-* and counterfactual mood applies *-nge-* and *-ngali-*. The forms *na-*, *me-*, *ka-* and *nge-* among the above are nor-

mally used in all the varieties. On the contrary, *cha-* is used to mark future tense in Kimakunduchi which in Standard Kiswahili is marked by *-ta-*. It can be argued that, although these TAM markers share structural features and origins, they do not function similarly.

While Standard Kiswahili uses the perfective morpheme *-me-* and the past tense morpheme *-li-* to mark anterior reference, Kimakunduchi uses *-me-* and vowel copy strategy. In such instance, the vowel of the penultimate syllable of the

verb is copied to the final vowel position as in:

(3) Standard Swahili

- (a) *Tumeimba*
Tu-me-imb-a
 2PL-Perf-sing-FV
 'We (have) sung.'
- (b) *Tuliimba*
Tu-li-imb-a
 2PL-Pst-sing-FV
 'We read.'

Kimakunduchi

- (c) *Tumesoma*
Tu-me-som-a
 2PL-Perf-sing-FV
 'We have read.'
- (d) *Tusoma*
Tu-Ø-som-a
 2PL-Perf-read-FV
 'We (have) read.'

Essentially, *me-* is not a perfective marker in Kimakunduchi as it is in Standard Kiswahili. Also, vowel copying does correspond to the Standard Kiswahili past tense marker *li-*. In Kimakunduchi, what functions as Standard Kiswahili *me-* is not the related prefix but the vowel copied through the vowel copy strategy. Vowel copy strategy is a phenomenon where the inflectional FV slot at the end of the verbal template duplicates the specific features of the preceding root vowel rather than utilizing fixed default vowels like *-a*, *-e*, or *-i*. The other examples are *kasomo* 's/he read', *kakamata* 's/he caught' and *kafungu* 's/he tied' which in Kiswahili are *amesoma*, *amekamata* and *amefunga* respectively. The vowels of the root including *-o* in *som-*, *-a* in *kamat-* and *-u* in *fung-* are copied to mark perfect aspect in Kimakunduchi.

Different from the Standard Kiswahili *-me-*, which cannot be used with the *-na-*, Kimakunduchi *me-* can be used in connection with the imperfective *-na-* to mark the perfect of continuous condition. Thus, when the two are used, the sentence becomes present perfect progressive tense. As shown in (4):

- (4)** *Kemenakat^ha k^huni*
Ka-me-na-kat^h-a k^huni
 SM-Perf-Prs-cut-FV firewood
 'S/he has been cutting firewood.'

This combination results from the semantic features of the prefixes. In Kimakunduchi, the present perfect aspect is marked by two morphemes, including the perfective *-me-* and the present tense affix *-na-*. Standard Kiswahili lacks such constructions, as only one tense/aspect marker is used at a time, as in *amekata kuni* 's/he has cut firewood' or *anakata kuni* 's/he is cutting firewood'. To mark present perfect progressive activity, two different words are used, as in *amekuwa akikata kuni* 's/he has been cutting firewood'.

• **Future Marking in Standard Kiswahili and Kimakunduchi**

Kimakunduchi future tense prefix *cha-* is reconstructed from the Proto-Bantu **-cāk-* 'desire, want'. It is comparable to this because it refers to the future 'want to do something'. Standard Kiswahili, on the other hand, uses the prefix *-ta-* to mark the future tense. The Kimakunduchi future morpheme *cha-* is differentiated from *ta-* in terms of phonological structure.

(5) Standard Kiswahili

- (a) *Nitasoma kesho*
Ni-ta-som-a kesho
 I-Fut-read-FV tomorrow
 'I shall read tomorrow.'

Kimakunduchi

- (b) *Kachasoma kesho*
Ka-cha-som-a kesho
 S/he-Fut-read-FV tomorrow
 'S/he will read tomorrow.'

The examples in (5) present the difference in future tense between Standard Kiswahili and Kimakunduchi. While Standard Kiswahili presents future tense with *-ta-*, Kimakunduchi does so with *cha-*. This does not refute the fact that they are dialects of the same language.

• **Tense/Aspect between Kiswahili and Kitumbatu**

The present tense marker in Standard Swahili is *-na-* but in Kitumbatu, it is *-a*. When *-a-* is used with the first-person singular affix *ni-*, the high front vowel /i/ merges with the present tense prefix *-a-*, which glides into /j/ (*i + a > ya*). This process is not experienced in Standard Kiswahili, in which the present tense prefix is *-na-*. The examples are presented and parsed below:

(6) **Standard Swahili**

Ninasoma Kiswahili

Ni-na-som-a ki-swahili

I-Prs-study-FV cl.7-swahili

‘I study Kiswahili’

Kitumbatu

Nyasoma Kiswahili

Ni-a-som-a Kiswahili

SM1SG-PRS-study-FV kiswahili

‘I study Swahili’

The examples in (6) reflect the differences in the present tense in Standard Kiswahili and Kitumbatu. When used with the first person singular prefix *ni-*, the present tense affix *-a-* in Kitumbatu undergoes some phonological processes of gliding and merging. The two vowels /i/ and /a/ merge into a palatal glide /j/, which merges with the alveolar nasal *n-* in the prefix *ni-* to form the palatal nasal /ɲ/, resulting in *nyasoma* /ɲasoma/.

• **Past Tense Positive Expression**

The past tense in Standard Kiswahili is presented by the affix *-li-* absent in Kitumbatu, in which the tense is marked by vowel copying: the final vowel is copied from the penultimate syllable of the verb. That is, in the areal varieties, there is no past tense morphology, but instead, there is vowel copying. For example:

(7) **Standard Swahili**

Nilikata nyama

Ni-li-kat-a N-ama

I-Pst-cut-FV cl.10-meat

‘I cut meat’

Kitumbatu

Nikata nyama

Ni-kat-a N-ama

I-cut-Pst cl.10-meat

‘I cut meat’

Kitumbatu past tense copies the vowel of the root to the final vowel. The vowel copying strategy is reflected in perfect aspect in Timakunduchi, which marks the differences between the two and between each with standard Kiswahili. While Kitumbatu applies vowel copying strategy to mark past tense, Kimakunduchi does so to mark perfect aspect.

• **Future Tense**

There is difference in expressing future tense between Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, the future tense morpheme is *-ta-* in Kiswahili, *-cha-* in Kimakunduchi and *-na-* in Kitumbatu, for example:

(8) **Standard Swahili**

Utatuambia nini

U-ta-tu-ambi-a nini?

2ndSG-FUT-OM-tell-FV what

‘What will you tell us?’

Kitumbatu

Kunatuambiya nini?

Ku-na-tu-ambi-a nini?

2ndSG-FUT-OM-tell-FV what

‘What will you tell us?’

Kimakunduchi

Kuchatuambiya nini?

Ku-cha-tu-ambi-ya nini?

2ndSG-FUT-OM-tell-FV what

‘What will you tell us?’

The future tense is marked in all three dialects, which reflects their belonging to the same language. However, the three dialects mark the future tense differently, with Kiswahili using *-na-*, Kitumbatu using *-na-* and Kimakunduchi using *-cha-*. While the 2nd person singular SM is marked by *ku-* in Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi, it is marked by *u-* in Standard Kiswahili. The SM for s/he is *ka* in Kimakunduchi but *-a* in Standard Kiswahili.

5. Discussion

The three dialects possess unique features that connect them to Kiswahili as a whole. Each of the dialects also possesses features unique to itself which differentiates it from others and other features connecting it to another and differentiating it from the other. This contributes to the understanding of historical underpinnings of language development and change. It also contributes to the possibility of addressing synchronic and diachronic features of a language in one study. The paper compares the dialects synchronically and uses the synchronic data to compare with the diachronically reconstructed terms. This is unique to this study and is helpful to future researchers who may wish to conduct the same studies in the future.

Observed Similarities and Differences in Relation to Historical Processes

The comparison of Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi shows that the dialects come from the same language, Kiswahili and they share a Bantu origin. However, they seem to have developed in slightly different ways over time. Evidence from the vocabulary shows that the

two dialects of Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi share many similar words, such as *jibwe* ‘stone’, *singo* ‘neck’, *nywili* ‘hair’, and *javi* ‘mat’. Their strong lexical similarity suggests that they have a common linguistic background within the Kiswahili language. Each of the two also shows some similarities with Standard Kiswahili. However, there are also clear differences. For example, Kitumbatu uses words like *tongolya* for ‘say’ and *chukulya* for ‘carry,’ while Kimakunduchi uses *chowea* and *weleka* and Standard Kiswahili uses *sema* and *beba*. These differences are argued to have developed over time due to language contact and geographical distance. These differences show that each community has developed some of its own vocabulary over time. The differences are not unique to Kiswahili dialects, as they have also been reported in other languages, including English, by Achyun et al.^[23], who differentiate the lexical items between British and American English. Such variations develop over time as the dialects disperse, each encountering language contact with neighbouring languages, new geographical features, innovations, etc. Chambers and Trudgill^[24] report the differences between how the same language is spoken in rural areas, which differ from how the same is spoken in urban areas. Thus, being a language used in urban settings and in nationwide communication, standard Kiswahili differs from Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu, which are spoken in rural and semi-urban areas in Zanzibar.

Differences also appear in pronunciation. Kitumbatu often adds the sound /ly/ in words such as *lyubavu* ‘rib’ and *kwelya* ‘climb’, while Kimakunduchi does not use this pattern. Instead, Kimakunduchi sometimes adds the sound /w/, as in *wokota* ‘pick up’ and *wezua* ‘invent’. Where Kitumbatu adds /ly/, Kimakunduchi adds /l/ or /w/ (word initial); Standard Kiswahili deletes both, remaining with a vowel (word initial), as in *ubavu* ‘rib’, and a vowel sequence (word medial), as in *vua* ‘fish’. Another example is the change of the sound /p/ to /v/ in Kimakunduchi, such as *vika* instead of *pika* for ‘cook.’ These pronunciation patterns show that each dialect has developed its own way of pronouncing words. The variation in pronunciation is not unique to Kiswahili dialects, as it is reported in other languages, including Runyambo, of which Mpobela^[25] differentiates between Runyamigongo and Runyamabhira dialects. Ukpai^[26] discusses the differences between the sound systems of Ikwo Igbo and Standard Igbo dialects and found differences in the phonological be-

haviour that lead to phonological processes like palatalization in Ikwo. The two dialects were found to differ in the number of phonemes, with 36 phonemes in Standard Igbo and 45 in Ikwo. This shows that dialectal differences are inevitable in the languages of the world. This suggests the historical relatedness among dialects that disperse from one geographical location, resulting in different changes. This finding suggests the need to conduct internal language differences among the dialects of the same language.

Variation in pronunciation of words by different speakers of the same language is also reported by Mpobela and Ngoboka^[27] when discussing the variation in pronunciation of English structures by speakers from different linguistic backgrounds in Tanzania. Tanzanian English speakers exhibit variation in pronunciation as a result of their linguistic background. Thus, Kimakunduchi and Kitumbatu speakers have a different pronunciation of Kiswahili terms. This presents the fact that the same language can show different phonological behaviours due to language contact and other geographical factors like distance from the standard variety.

There are also small grammatical differences. For example, in the negative present tense, Standard Kiswahili says *ha-tu-som-i*, but Kimakunduchi says *ha-tu-na-som-a*. Kitumbatu also shows differences in past tense marking, sometimes dropping the marker *-li-* that appears in Standard Kiswahili. The differences in forming negatives are also reported in English, while the dialects of Colombian Spanish, including Cordoba and Antioquia, differ in how they present the second person singular with *tu* and *vos*, respectively^[28]. Mansfield et al.^[28] argue that grammatical form variables frequently differentiate dialects, including dialects in close contact. Thus, dialects differ in grammatical properties like comitatives, adjectival distributions, negation, etc. Some of such differences are reflected not only among dialects but also among sister languages, as argued by Ferdinand^[29], when comparing Oluhaya, Oluganda and Kiswahili. This is evidenced by Munteanu^[30] in his study on comparative reconstruction, in which different sister languages are compared to reconstruct their prehistory.

Overall, these examples suggest that although Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi share the same historical roots, factors such as geographical separation and local community life allowed them to develop differently. On the other hand, Sadigzade^[31] shows how contemporary

social changes like urbanization and the rise in social media reshape dialect diversity in English. Thus, the use of Standard Kiswahili in urban areas and on social media is likely to have affected its structure, leading to increased differences between it and the other two dialects. Kitumbatu seems to keep several older Kiswahili features, while Kimakunduchi shows more changes in pronunciation and grammar. This reflects how the history and social life of Zanzibar communities have shaped the development of these dialects. The most common criteria for distinguishing dialects are socio-cultural levels of speakers, the origin of dialects, the region, the type of locality and the frequency of their functioning^[32]. Standard Kiswahili is socio-culturally at a high level, standardized and spoken in a wide geographical area. Being spoken in a wide geographical area and spoken in many countries, Kiswahili has the chance of exhibiting wide dialectal differences. Thus, in addition to the three dialects in this paper, the dialectal differences in Kiswahili can be expanded into other dialects, including those spoken in different countries. This is supported by Bader et al.^[33], who argue that regional dialect variation of English results from its being spoken across the world. On the other hand, the standardization of Standard Kiswahili^[34] has added to its uniqueness compared to the two dialects. It is widely spoken in Tanzania and beyond causing it to have features of other languages both Bantu and non-Bantu ones.

6. Conclusions

This study shows that Standard Kiswahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi are closely related dialects of Kiswahili that share a common Bantu foundation. They have many similarities in vocabulary and structure, but they also differ in pronunciation, word forms, negation, and tense marking. This suggests their belonging to one language and their differences as dialects. The dialects are typologically similar, reflecting the agglutinating nature of Kiswahili and Bantu. Historically, the dialects have descended from Proto-Bantu, but the reflexes are still found in all. Standard Kiswahili seems to have diverged more from the proto-sounds, possibly due to standardisation, which might have added new vocabulary and modified some sounds. These differences are systematic and reflect historical development, geographical separation, and language contact within Zanzibar. Over-

all, the findings confirm that dialect variation in Zanzibar is structured and meaningful, and that the dialects are important parts of the Kiswahili language heritage.

Theoretically, it can be concluded that the typological similarities and differences are evident among the dialects, making the Typological and Comparative theories applicable. The data sets are systematically compared while addressing the typological and comparative aspects of the three dialects. The comparison presents the phonological, morphological and syntactic similarities and differences among the three dialects. Each of the dialects possesses unique features. At the same time, one dialect has some features that assimilate it to the other dialect and differentiate it from the other. This makes this study interesting and calls for the detailed study of all the dialects of Kiswahili.

It is recommended that more detailed research be conducted on Standard Swahili, Kitumbatu and Kimakunduchi to further document their grammatical and lexical features. Efforts should also be made to document dialects of different languages through written records and audio documentation. In addition, educational institutions should promote awareness of local dialects as an important part of linguistic heritage.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, L.M. and K.A.Y.; methodology, L.M.; formal analysis, L.M. and K.A.Y.; investigation, L.M. and K.A.Y.; resources, L.M. and K.A.Y.; data curation, L.M.; writing—original draft preparation, K.A.Y.; writing—review and editing, L.M.; visualization, L.M. and K.A.Y.; supervision, L.M.; project administration, L.M. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

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Data Availability Statement

All data are included within the article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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