Swahili in Tanzania Video Transcripts

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"Visiting a Friend at Home"

Swahili transcript:

"Mama: Karibu!

(This is a combination of "welcome" and "come in." Often it is repeated several times in the course of receiving a guest in formal and informal situations.)

Guest: Ahsante.

("Thank you.")

Mama: Habari yako?

("How are you?" Literally, she is asking "What is the news on you?")

Guest: Habari za leo?

(The guest responds to her question with one of his own: "How is today?" This is equivalent to: "How is your day?" Responding to a question with another question is common. It usually implies that the response to the former is positive and that you are concerned about how the other is doing.)

Mama: Nzuri tu.

("Good." Literally "Only good" which means that she is fine.)

Guest: Mzima kabisa?

(To indicate his genuine concern for her wellbeing, the guest rephrases his question to: "Are you completely well?" This is asked specifically of her own wellbeing. It is common to ask how a person is doing multiple times, each time phrased slightly differently. This may be because mostly people will say they are fine, and any indication that they are not will surface from how they continue to respond.)

Mama: Wazima.

(The lady of the house answers that "they are fine," referring to her family and household. She either anticipates that his next question will be about them or is reassuring him that she is fine because her household is doing well.)

Guest: Mwisho ni mzima?

(It is extremely impolite to immediately bring up the reason for your visit without a set of acceptable greetings. The hostess knows that the guest is not here to visit her, and he finally makes this clear by asking specifically about the health/wellbeing of the one individual in her household who is of interest to him: Mwisho.)

Mama: Yupo. Mwisho! Mgeni wako! Mwisho! Mgeni wako!

(Knowing that the guest is merely going through formalities, the hostess answers the subtle question implied : "Is Mwisho there?" She calls out for Mwisho to let him know that the visitor is here for him.)

Guest: Shikamoo.

(This is a greeting that will come up at some point during the exchange of greetings with anyone above your age-class. It is initiated by the younger person and considered rude if it is not delivered. Depending on the closeness of the relationship, it will appear earlier or later in the dialogue sometimes resulting in a reminder from the older person for the greeting to be delivered!)

Mama: Marahaba. Habari za nyumbani?

("Marahaba" is the response to "shikamoo." The back and forth exchange of information about how the guest or hostess and their households are doing will continue throughout the semi-formal dialogue between the mother and her son's friend.)

Guest: Salama tu. Vipi mambo?

(The guest responds to the mother's question-literally saying "all is safe [at home]." He then addresses his friend with an informal greeting, used mostly among youths: "How are things" equivalent to "what's up?".)

Mwisho: Mambo poa.

(This is a colloquial response: "things are chilled/cool." Sometimes you will here "mambo freshi/safi" i.e. "things are fresh/clean".)

Guest: Za leo?

(Notice that while talking to his age-mate, he is much less formal and does not bother with the "habari" part of the same question he asked Mwisho's mother; he merely asks "of today?".)

Mwisho: Ah, safi tu.

(His response is still colloquial but you will also hear it among older people. Swahili has become less formal and more people are relaxing their ways of speaking.)

Guest: Naona upo.

(Even among friends, you have a phrase in which you do not exchange too much information. The guest is probably a regular visitor and is not too concerned about his friend's seemingly unenthusiastic response to his presence. It is a relaxed environment in which they are both comfortable. All he states is "I see that you are here/home". In Swahili, stating what may seem as "the obvious" is common, acceptable and a way to step into a new environment.)

Mwisho: Karibu bwana. Mimi nilikua nacheki tivi hapa.

(The two refer to themselves as "sir", but in this context, it is equivalent to the "man" in English. Mwisho maintains the relaxed "hanging out" atmosphere by also stating what he is doing.)

Guest. Ah, poa bwana.

(The guest accepts the environment, sits down and becomes part of the scene.)

Mama: Vipi, mama hajambo?

(Parents, especially mothers, will continually interrupt the flow of conversation between youths to ask about the extended family, if it is of interest to them. Because she sees Mwisho's friends more often than their mothers-who may be her friends too-she takes the opportunity to extract as much information out of him as she can. Her interruptions are not considered rude or inappropriate.)

Guest: Mzima kabisa.

Mama. Ndiyo.

("Ndiyo" means "yes," but it can also mean "good" or show some level of understanding and accepting of the situation.)

Guest: Watoto hawajambo?

(There is almost always a level of formality between a friend and his friend's parents. The guest is responding to her concern for his family by reciprocating concern for her family.)

Mama: Hawajambo...Karibu sana.

(It is obvious here that Mwisho's mother does not get to see the visitor often even though he and Mwisho may visit each other regularly. This is shown in her second welcome to him: for her, it is unusual to have him visiting.)

Guest: Ahsante. Baba Mwasi yupo?

(The family inquiries continue.)

Mama: Yupo.

Guest: Yupo?

Mama: Ee.

Guest: Atakuwa yuko wapi?

Mama: Yuko mjini.

Guest: Yuko mjini?

(Notice that the guest repeats the answer to his questions. This happens often and is just a means of making sure that one understands.)

Mama: Ee. Endelea kuongea na Mwisho hapo.

(Most mothers will leave their children alone with their visitors after a few greetings and a bit of conversation. They could still come in and interrupt with more questions, an invitation that the visitor join them for the meal, etc.)

Mwisho: Unajua tena, cheki marimoti kibao hapa...

(With the mother absent, most youth will then start a "deeper" conversation between themselves.)

Mama: Utakunywa chai

(Her invitation for tea is more: "[If I make tea], will you drink any?")

Guest: Ee, nitakunywa chai.

(He responds that he will. The fact that he does not add a "thank you" to his response shows again that he is a common guest and that the relationship between him and her is semi-formal. He will say thank you when he has got the cup of tea. Also, she may then call Mwisho to come pick the tea up from the kitchen and will not bother herself with serving it.)

Mama: Haya.

"

English translation:

"Mama: Welcome!

Guest: Thank you.

Mama: How are you?

Guest: How is today?

Mama: Okay/good.

Guest: Are you well?

Mama: We are well/fine.

Guest: Is Mwisho fine?

Mama: He is around. Mwisho! Your visitor! Mwisho! Your visitor!

Guest: Shikamoo [a greeting for anyone older than yourself]

Mama: Marahaba [reply to the greeting]. How are things at home?

Guest: Good. [To Mwisho]: What's up?

Mwisho: All's well.

Guest: How are you today?

Mwisho: Oh, good.

Guest: I see you are around.

Mwisho: Welcome man. I was just [sitting] here watching television.

Guest. Ah, [that's] cool man.

Mama: So, how is your mother?

Guest: She is very fine/well.

Mama. Good.

Guest: How are the children?

Mama: They are fine...You are very welcome.

Guest: Thank you. Is the (lit.,) father of Mwasi around [i.e. is your husband around]?

Mama: He's around.

Guest: He is?

Mama: Yes.

Guest: Where would he be?

Mama: He is in town.

Guest: He's in town?

Mama: Yes. Go on talking to Mwisho here.

Mwisho: You know how it is, look at all these remote controls here...

Mama: Will you have some tea?

Guest: Yes, I will have some tea.

Mama: Okay.

"

About Language by Country: The Language by Country videos and other materials were produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages between 1999 - 2003 with funding from the National Security Education Program (NSEP) and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) of the U.S. Department of Education. The videos were filmed by Five College international students in their home countries. The goal was to provide examples of authentic language spoken in its natural cultural environment so that students of all ages can better understand the interplay between a language and its culture. We have tried to remain true to the language our subjects actually uttered. Therefore, we have not corrected grammatical errors and the videos sometimes show highly colloquial language, local slang, and regionally specific speech patterns. At times, we have noted the preferred or more standard forms in parentheses. Most of the transcripts and translations were prepared by the same students who filmed the video, although in some cases the transcripts have also been edited by a language expert.

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