TRANSLATORS
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Fr

En

Congolese
Swahili

The challenges of translation
into Congolese Swahili

Machine translation

- Machine translation is a useful language services tool.

- For many languages such as French, machine translation services such as Google Translate can render a high quality translation.

- However, for local languages there are limits.

- Google Translate renders translations into Swahili from Tanzania. However, this Swahili is misunderstood and misinterpreted in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
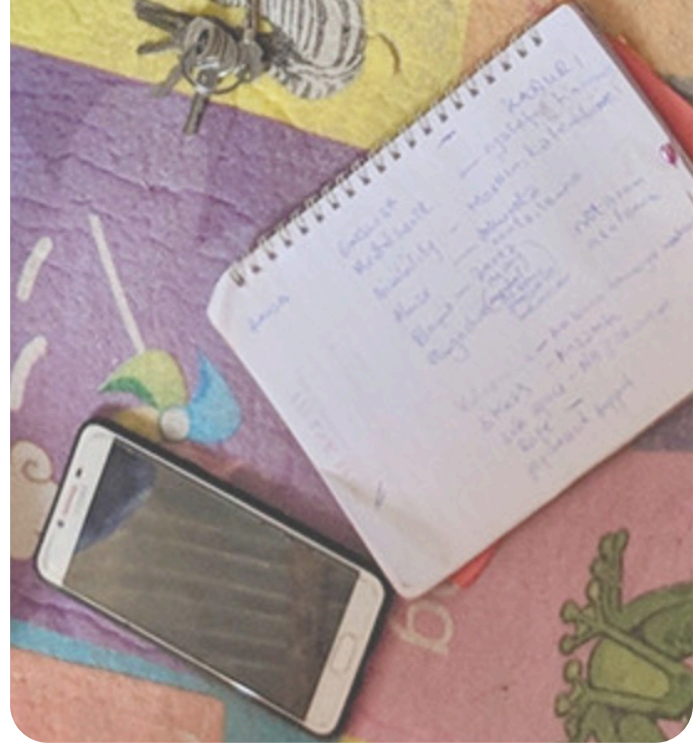
Congolese Swahili

- DRC Swahili is a mixture of Swahili and French, with many terms specific to the Congolese context.

English	Google Translate	Congolese Swahili
Once the test is negative, the family can take care of the funeral themselves	Mara tu **mtihani** ukiwa hasi, familia inaweza **kutunza** mazishi yao wenyewe	Ikiwa tu **vipimo** vinaonesha kama ni mtu ambaye hakuhakikishwa ku kuwa na ugonjwa, familia inaweza **kufanya** mazishi yenyewe.

- **Mtihani** is an exam taken in school in DRC. Here Google Translate uses this word to refer to a medical test. Instead, in the DRC **kipimo** or **vipimo** is used.

- **Kutunza** is «to heal» in Congolese Swahili. Here Google Translate uses this word to mean «to manage the funeral». Instead, in the DRC one uses **kufanya** or **kushurulikia** when it comes to dealing with a funeral. So «taking care of a funeral» doesn't really mean anything in Congolese Swahili.

English	Google Translate	Congolese Swahili
What we heard: Why do the Safe and Dignified Burial (SDB) teams insist on intervening even for a death with a negative Ebola test result?	Tulichosikia: Je! Kwanini **timu** zinazofaa na salama za Mazishi (EDS) **zinasisitiza** kuingilia kati hata kwa kifo kibaya?	Tulichosikia: Kwa nini **vikundi** vya mazishi yenyi heshima na usalama **vinataka** kuingilia na kufanya kazi ata kwenye kifo ya mtu ambaye hakuhakikishwa kuwa na ugonjwa?

- **Timu** is «team» in Tanzanian Swahili. In Congolese Swahili, however, this term is often better understood as a sports team. The term **Vikundi** in Congolese Swahili is better understood in eastern DRC.

- **Zinasisitiza** ("insist") is Tanzanian Swahili. In Congolese Swahili it doesn't mean anything. **Kutaka** (infinitive), **vintaka** (conjugated verb) is used in DRC.

- By translating the translation from Google Translate back to English, the result is totally different from the original sentence: What we heard: Why do proper and safe funeral teams (DHS) insist on intervening even in the event of a tragic death?

English	Google Translate	Congolese Swahili
There is also the fact of managing several chores around the house which can cause them to touch objects contaminated by the sick family member.	Kuna ukweli pia wa **kusimamia** majukumu kadhaa ya nyumba ambayo yanaweza kuwaongoza kugusa **vitu vilivyochafuliwa na yule jamaa wa mgonjwa**	Kunakuwa pia kama vile **wanaongoza** kazi zote za nyumbani ambazo zinaweza tuma wanagusa **viombo vya mugonjwa wa mu familia vyenye kukuwa na maambukiziaji.**

- **Kuongoza** (infinitive), **wanaongoza** (conjugated verb) for «to manage or direct» is better understood in DRC than **kusimamia** which is understood as «to stand above».

- **«Vitu vilivyochafuliwa na yule jamaa wa mgonjwa»** means in DRC Swahili **«objects soiled by this sick person»**. Instead of saying «viombo vya mugonjwa wa mu familia vyenye kukuwa na maambukiziaji» which means «objects contaminated by the sick family member».

English	Google Translate	Congolese Swahili
Term to avoid	**Muda** wa kujiepusha	Neno ya kuepuka

- **Muda** means time, so the meaning of the sentence changes and becomes; time to avoid instead of term to avoid.

Conclusion

Machine Translation can be a good tool for translating content from Swahili to French, from French to English or vice versa. However, the nuances and differences present in Congolese Swahili should not be overlooked.

In addition, these machine translation engines do not yet have the capability in many local languages. We see that options are starting to be offered in languages such as Kinyarwanda (Google Translate), but there is still a long way to go.

It is important to communicate in a language understood by the local community, taking into account the specificities of the local dialect.

Translators Without Borders works to strengthen the capacity and quality of machine translation of marginalized languages. To learn more about our work on localization, see:

https://translatorswithoutborders.org