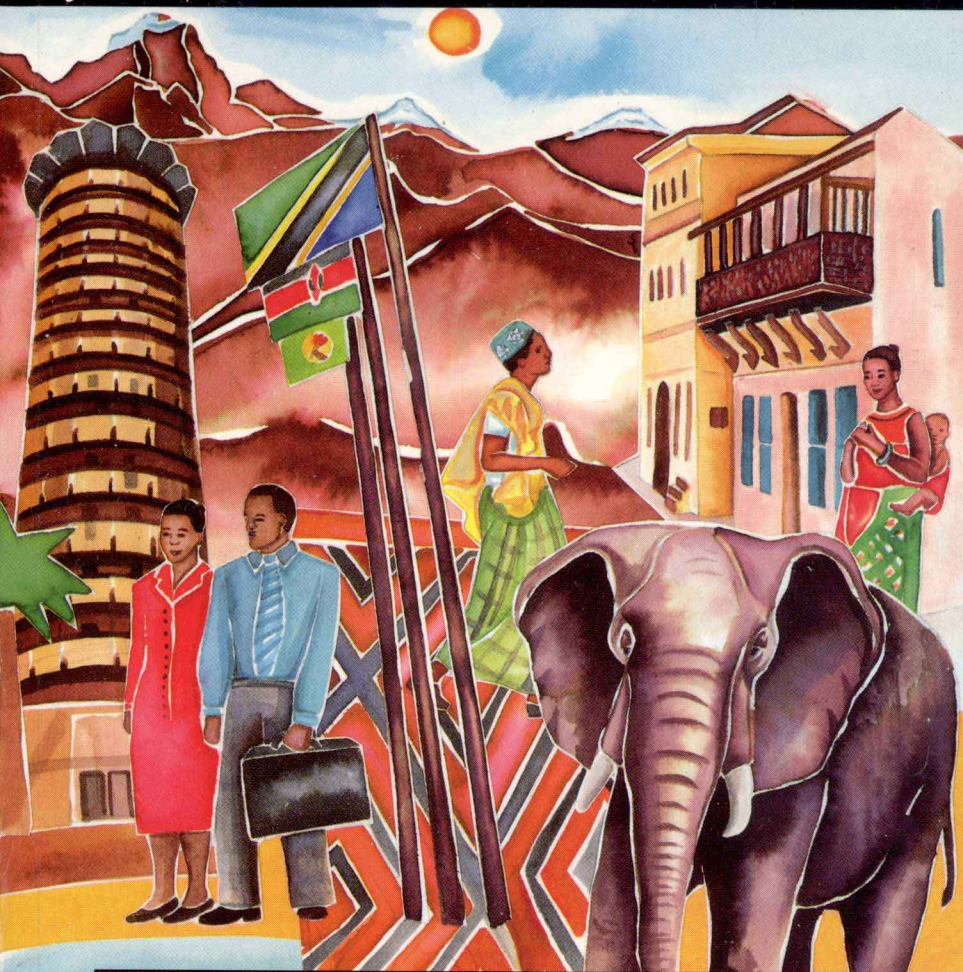


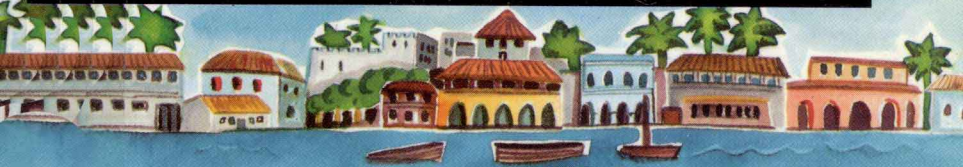


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Swahili

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TEACH YOURSELF

Swahili

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue entry for this title is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 92-80900.

First published in UK 1996 by Hodder Headline Plc, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH

First published in US 1996 by NTC/Contemporary Publishing, 4255 West Touhy Avenue, Lincolnwood (Chicago), Illinois 60646 – 1975 U.S.A.

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Typeset by Transet Ltd, Coventry.

Printed in Great Britain for Hodder & Stoughton Educational, a division of Hodder Headline Plc, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH by Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berkshire.

Impression number	13	12	11	10	9
Year	2002	2001			

Swahili

Joan Russell

TEACH YOURSELF BOOKS

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to my language consultant, Rehema Rajabu, for her painstaking checking of the manuscript and for many helpful suggestions.

Many people have indirectly influenced the content of this book, from friends, colleagues and chance acquaintances in Kenya and Tanzania to several generations of students at the University of York who took Swahili electives; I am indebted to them all. This debt extends to Daphne Perrott, author of the first *Teach Yourself Swahili*, and to Ethel Ashton, whose book, *Swahili Grammar*, has influenced our understanding of the structure of the language for over half a century.

My thanks go to people who – knowingly or unknowingly – have provided direct input, either with linguistic or social information or in some other way: Amina Ali, Jacob & Virgilia Amuli, Susie Bowen, Olwyn Fonseca, Ken Kaduki, Abdallah Madenge, Joshua Madumulla, Balla Masele, Kokuumba Mtajuka, Steve Nicolle and Alison Ross.

I am particularly pleased that Eileen McClelland undertook to do the drawings.

My grateful thanks go to Debbie Phillippo for so efficiently producing a clear manuscript from the untidy and not always very legible drafts and also to Caty Blacktop and Muriel Wood for helping out during the occasional emergency.

The author and publishers would like to thank the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

The Institute of Kiswahili Research, University of Dar es Salaam, for the extract from *Kipande cha Akili*, in the collection of folktales *Fasihi-Simulizi ya Mtanzania: Hadithi*, published by Dar es Salaam University Press; E. Kezilahabi for the poem *Ngoma ya Kimya* in the collection of his poems *Karibu Ndani*, published by Dar es Salaam University Press; S. Ndunguru, for the extract from Chapter II of *Urithi Wetu*, published by Ndanda Enterprises (T) Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

About Swahili

Swahili is the most extensively used of the hundreds of Bantu languages spoken in many areas of sub-Saharan Africa. A knowledge of Swahili will enable you to make yourself understood throughout much of east and central Africa.

Swahili is a language that developed and spread through the trading links that the coastal towns had with the interior of Africa and with the lands around the Indian Ocean. Until the early part of the nineteenth century its use was largely confined to the people of the coastal and island towns, stretching from what is now the Somali Republic southwards to Mozambique.

The expansion of the trade-routes between the island of Zanzibar, the coast and the interior gave an impetus to the use of Swahili as a means of communication between people at trading-places who did not share the same 'home language'. Most of the major trade-routes went through modern Tanzania. It is in Tanzania that the use of Swahili is the most widespread. Even in remote areas far from towns, where people have little need to use a language other than their home language, there are likely to be at least some people who know Swahili. For many Tanzanians, Swahili, even if not the first language acquired in childhood, is now the language they use most during the working day. It is the country's national language, and is used in government administration, in schools and in the media.

Pre-twentieth-century links between the coast of Kenya and the interior were much less extensive than those further south and so the use of Swahili did not spread inland to the extent it did in Tanzania. However, all along the Kenya coast and islands, in the inland towns and wherever there is a mixed population of speakers of different languages, Swahili is in use. As in Tanzania, Swahili is a national language, and is used in schools and the media.

Uganda's history and geographical position has not favoured the use of a 'standard' east coast form of Swahili. There was no indigenous Swahili-speaking community from whom the use of the language might have spread. Nevertheless, it is used in Kampala and some of the larger towns.

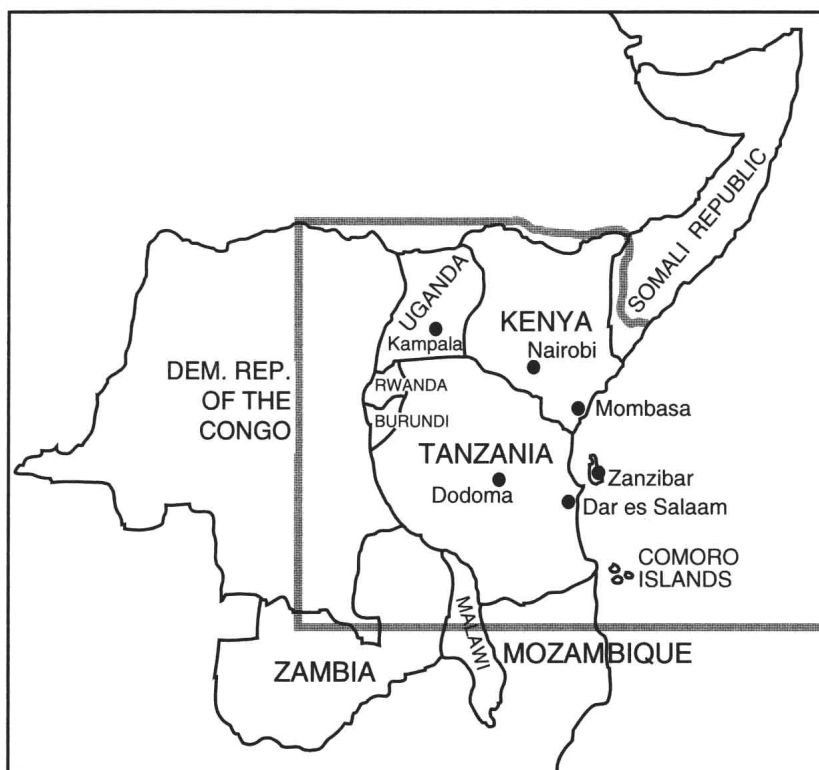
In these three countries Swahili shares its function as *lingua franca* (auxiliary language) with English in certain domains of use – in the tourist trade, for example. Further west it is French that fulfils this function.

Swahili is also spoken in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), and is officially recognised as one of the country's four national languages. D.R.C. (Zairean) Swahili differs in some respects from the kind spoken further east, but it is recognisably Swahili; if you go to the Democratic Republic of the Congo it is better to know some Tanzanian/Kenyan **Kiswahili Sanifu** than to know none at all. Swahili is also understood in parts of Rwanda and Burundi.

On the margins of the Swahili-speaking area, and this includes the border areas of northern Malawi and Zambia as well as the southern Somali coast and the northern end of the Mozambique coast, you should not expect everyone to know Swahili. In some places it may only be a small proportion of the men in the population who have a working knowledge of it. You should also not be surprised to hear something which at first sounds as if it might be Swahili but turns out to be the local language, which has absorbed words from Swahili.

Since millions of people who use Swahili in east and central Africa have acquired it as a second or third language, people are very relaxed about talking to someone who speaks it rather differently from the way they do. An unfamiliar way of speaking is a source of interest rather than the subject of criticism. No one is going to be horrified or offended if you make mistakes, or have a strong accent to


start with. People will be pleased that you are learning Swahili, whether it is their own language or one that they have just picked up or learnt at school. The important thing is to want to talk to people!




How to use this course


The course is divided into two parts. Units 1–6 form Part One, a basic survival package for people who do not have time to work through the whole course but would like to get some idea of how the language works, and want something more than a phrase book. Units 7–18, in Part Two, build on the foundation of Part One, and are for people who


would like to do more than just 'survive' with the language. Each unit builds on what you have learnt in the previous units, and opens with a short list of what you will know how to say after working through the unit.

Each unit starts with a dialogue: two dialogues per unit in Part One, and one per unit in Part Two. These dialogues, called **Mazungumzo** in Swahili and marked by the symbol , are at the heart of each unit and introduce the new words and grammatical structures in the context of an everyday situation.

Then comes a boxed list of the new words and phrases in the order in which they occur in the dialogue. This list of new vocabulary is marked .

Next is a section of background information to help you put the dialogue into the context of life in eastern Africa. This is called **Maarifa yenye manufaa**, or *worth knowing*.

The next section, **Maelezo**, meaning *Explanation*, is marked  and explains the new structures used in the dialogue. Grammatical terms are kept to a minimum and only used where absolutely necessary to give you 'short cuts' to learning. The terms are introduced, with English examples, at the point where they are needed in an explanation.


The final section of each unit is **Majaribio** (*exercises*), marked . These provide a range of activities which will help you to check your understanding of the dialogue and your ability to use the new words and structures. You will find the answers in the Key to the Exercises following Unit 18.

The Appendix (p288–94) contains summaries of the grammatical information taught in the course.

At the end of the book there are Swahili–English and English–Swahili vocabulary lists containing words taught in the course.

How to use the course with the cassette

You will find it helpful to do some listening before you start working through the course. If you are using the cassette you should listen to the pronunciation of the sounds and words. If you do not have the cassette and are already in a Swahili-speaking area, listen to as much Swahili as you can.

You can see what is on the cassette from the symbol  next to passages in the book. When you work through a unit, read the dialogue several times (listening to the cassette if you have it) using the boxed vocabulary to help you understand it. When you think you have understood most of it read through (and listen) again. It is the dialogue that is most likely to give you a 'feel' for the language and you should not go on to the **Maelezo** – the *explanation* section – until you have a good grasp of the dialogue.

How to study

Try to set aside a certain amount of time each day for working on the course. Half an hour each day would be more helpful than one longer session per week. You need frequent practice when you are starting on a language, or trying to brush-up a half-forgotten one.

Set a definite – but realistic – goal for each Swahili-learning session, e.g. aim to work through one dialogue, to learn one list of vocabulary, or to read and understand two sections of a **Maelezo**. When you learn anything by heart, whether single words, phrases (groups of words) or whole sentences, try to imagine yourself using them in real situations and say them to yourself aloud. Writing things down will also help you to remember them. Try putting lists of vocabulary where you will see them every day – near the bathroom mirror, in the kitchen or by your bed. Try to link your language-learning with activities in your everyday life: for instance, write part of a shopping list in Swahili, keep a daily diary in Swahili – even if, to start with, it is only a sentence or two.

One of the interesting features of Swahili which will help your vocabulary learning is that it has a number of English 'loan-words' in it. A loan-word is a word used in a language other than the one where it originated. Like English, Swahili has a very rich vocabulary because of the words it has absorbed from other languages. Many have come from Arabic and Persian as well as from Gujerati, Hindi, Portuguese and – more recently – English. The reason that you already know the word *safari* in English is because it is a loan-word from Swahili; but it was originally taken into Swahili from Arabic. Loan-words are pointed out from time to time in the course because they 'behave' differently from words of Bantu origin.

You will find that you need to keep a very open mind about language structure; don't expect Swahili to work like English or any other language you know, although here and there you may find similarities. One big difference is in the way the words are composed. For example, in English when we talk about more than one of something we usually add something to the end of the noun, as in *cat* → *cats*, or we change one or more of its sounds as in *mouse* → *mice*, or we even do both, as in *child* → *children*. But in Swahili it is the beginning of the noun that changes: **mtoto** (*child*) → **watoto** (*children*); **kikapu** (*basket*) → **vikapu** (*baskets*). (This is how it works most of the time, but there is a pleasant surprise in store for you in Unit 2.)

There are also differences in the way words are *organised* in sentences. One very obvious difference is the way 'qualifiers' are used with nouns. (Examples of nouns: *cat*, *house*, *mouse*, *woman*, *child*, *basket*, *happiness*, *tree*.) A qualifier is a word or group of words used with a noun to add some more information. The words attached to *tree(s)* in the following examples are all qualifiers: *tall trees*; *three trees*; *our trees*; *other trees*; *all trees*; *this tree*; *trees with long roots*; *the tree itself*; *any tree at all*. You will notice that most of the qualifiers come in front of the noun *tree(s)*. In all these examples Swahili puts the qualifier after the noun. So in Swahili we would say: *trees tall*, *trees three*, *trees our*, *trees other* – and so on.


There are other differences to look out for, and you will be introduced to them gradually as you go through the units. Points which are especially important are indicated by the symbol ✱.

Abbreviations

(syll.)	syllable
(sing.)	singular
(pl.)	plural
lit.	literally
-ni	something must precede ni
ki-	something must follow ki
-ta-	something must precede <i>and</i> follow ta

PRONUNCIATION

The best way to acquire good Swahili pronunciation is to imitate native-speakers or people who learned Swahili at school and use it as their primary means of communication. There are two basic rules which will help you to get off to a good start:

-  **1** In Swahili the stress of a word almost always falls on the next-to-last syllable. The ´ shows the stressed syllable in the following words: **bába** (2 syllables), **mtóto** (3 syllables), **amepáta** (4 syllables), **aliyekúja** (5 syllables).
- 2** Keep your voice level, and do not try to emphasise a word by giving it extra stress or raise the pitch of your voice to show surprise. Swahili does, of course, have its own patterns of intonation (rise and fall), which you will acquire naturally, through imitation, but the extent of the rise and fall is much less than in English.

Vowels

Letter	Approximate sound	Example
a	pronounced rather like the a in <i>father</i> but halfway towards <i>bat</i>	baba <i>father</i>
e	pronounced rather like e in <i>get</i> , but it should feel slightly longer	pete <i>ring</i>
i	pronounced like ee in <i>see</i>	kisu <i>knife</i>
o	pronounced like o in <i>olé</i> , with the lips kept well apart throughout the sound	boga <i>pumpkin</i>
u	pronounced like oo in <i>tooth</i>	dudu <i>pest</i>

Notes:

- 1 When **a** comes at the end of a word it should be pronounced more like a beginning or middle **a** than like **er**. For example, **baba** should not be made to sound like *barber*. This means that you need to keep your mouth well open for the final **a**.
- 2 When two different vowels occur together each keeps its own sound and forms a separate syllable: **faida**: **fa-i-da** (3 syllables); **aibu**: **a-i-bu** (3 syllables).
- 3 Two similar vowels occurring together count as two syllables, as far as stress is concerned, and are pronounced as a long vowel. For example, **kúfa** (*to die*) has two syllables and **kufáa** (*to be suitable*) has three. (These double vowels are very often the result of the loss of an earlier **l** between the vowels. Later on, you will see that, in certain circumstances, the **l** reappears.)



Consonants

In writing Swahili, the only letters of the alphabet that are not used are **q** and **x**.

In the first group of consonants each sound is represented by one letter. The Swahili sound is much the same as the English sound represented by the same letter, but take note of the special comment on **b**, **d**, **g** and **j**.

Letter	Approximate sound	Example
b	like b in <i>book</i>	baba <i>father</i>
d	like d in <i>day</i>	dada <i>sister</i>
f	like f in <i>father</i>	fimbo <i>stick</i>
g	like g in <i>get</i>	gari <i>vehicle</i>
h	like h in <i>hot</i>	habari <i>news</i>
j	like j in <i>job</i>	joto <i>heat</i>
k	like k in <i>keep</i>	kiti <i>chair</i>
l	like l in <i>like</i>	leo <i>today</i>
m	like m in <i>make</i>	mama <i>mother</i>
n	like n in <i>no</i>	na <i>and</i>
p	like p in <i>pot</i>	pata <i>get</i>
r	like r in <i>carrot</i>	chura <i>frog</i>
s	like s in <i>soft</i>	sasa <i>now</i>
t	like t in <i>bat</i>	bata <i>duck</i>
v	like v in <i>voice</i>	vuka <i>cross</i>
w	like w in <i>wait</i>	watu <i>people</i>

y like **y** in *yet*
z like **z** in *zoo*

yetu *our*
zetu *our*

Note on **b, d, g** and **j**

If you have the cassette or have listened quite a lot to people speaking Swahili you may have noticed that when these sounds come at the beginning of a word or between vowels – **baba** is a good example – they have a slightly ‘hollow’ sound. This is because they are produced with a downward movement of the ‘voice-box’ and an intake of breath. In words such as **mbegu**, **ndefu**, **ngoma** and **njema** they sound (and are produced) much more like the English sounds. The two different kinds of **b, d, g** and **j** don’t make a difference to the meaning of the word so if you cannot manage the ‘gulped’ ones just use the English sounds.

The **j** sound, except when it follows **n**, needs your tongue-tip to be behind your lower teeth and the main part of your tongue to be touching the roof of the mouth, behind the hard ridge at the back of your upper teeth. If you eventually aim for native-speaker pronunciation you should try to manage this, but it is best practised by watching someone making this sound.



Notes on **m**

(Come back to this after Units 1, 2 and 5.)

- Two groups of words, the singular nouns of classes M/WA (Unit 1) and M/MI (Unit 5) have **m** at the beginning, as a syllable:

mtu (2 syllables) **mtoto** (3 syllables) **mnanasi** (4 syllables)

If **w** follows **m** in words of these two classes, the **m** is not a separate syllable:

mwana (2 syllables) **mwanangu** (3 syllables)

- If **m** comes at the beginning of a word in the N class of nouns (Unit 2) it is not a separate syllable. It ‘merges’ into the next sound which is always either **b** or **v**. So don’t linger on the **m** in **mbegu** (2 syllables) or **mvua** (2 syllables).



In the second group of consonants each sound is represented by two letters.

Letter Approximate sound

ch like **ch** in *chop*

Example

chakula *food*

dh	like th in <i>this</i>	dhahabu <i>gold</i>
gh	like ch in Scots <i>loch</i> (see kh below) but voiced	ghali <i>expensive</i>
kh	like ch in Scots <i>loch</i> or German <i>Bach</i>	Khamisi <i>man's name</i>
ng'	like ng in <i>song</i>	ng'ombe <i>cow</i>
ny	like n in <i>new</i> and the first n in <i>onion</i>	nyama <i>meat</i>
sh	like sh in <i>ship</i>	shauri <i>advice</i>
th	like th in <i>thin</i>	thelathini <i>thirty</i>

Voiced and voiceless sounds

(to help with **gh** and **kh**, and with the N class words in Unit 2)

Before trying **gh** and **kh**, make sure you can tell the difference between a voiced sound and a voiceless one. Make the English sounds **p** (voiceless) and **b** (voiced) alternately, with a finger resting lightly on the front of your throat. When you make the **b** sound you should be able to feel the movement in your throat caused by the vibration of the vocal cords in your 'voice-box'. Then try **k** and **g**, and finally **kh** and **gh**. The **kh** and **gh** sounds occur in words of Arabic origin. You need only use the **kh** sound for words that have **kh** in the spelling; it occurs in some Muslim names, such as **Khadija**, and a few greetings. You may hear native-speakers using **kh** in some of the words spelt with **h**, but as this is only appropriate in certain words, it would be best to always pronounce written **h** as **h**.

*Notes on **ny**, **ng** and **ng'***

- 1 Remember that **ny** represents a single sound. In Swahili it must never be pronounced like **nigh**.
- 2 **ng** without the following apostrophe represents the **ng** sound in *finger*, *hunger*, *longer*, where the **g** is sounded.
- 3 **ng'** has no **g** sound in it.



Pronunciation practice

1 Practise the double vowels

(The words with a hyphen at the beginning are verbs.)

aa	ee	ii	oo	uu
- faa	mzee	hii	choo	buluu
- kaa	niletee	mtalii	koo	mguu
saa	pekee	utalii	kondoo	wakuu

2 Practise using **m**. In the first column **m** is a syllable, in the second and third columns it is not.

mfinyanzi	mwana	mbati
mgeni	mwalimu	mbavu
mtoto	mwezi	mbegu
mtu	mwili	mvua

Notice that in **mtu** the **m** is stressed.

3 Nasal sounds: **ng'**, **ng** and **ny**.

(a) Practise **ng'**, after checking it in the second list of consonants. For most (not all) English-speakers this is the sound at the end of *sang*, *wrong*, *hung*, etc., and in the middle of *hangar*, *singer*, etc. There is no **g** sound.

Try separating *hangar* like this: *ha-ngar*, then drop the *ha*, and say the second part several times. Then just do **ng'** with all the Swahili vowels, so that you say: **ng'a**, **ng'e**, **ng'i**, **ng'o**, **ng'u**.

Then practise these words:

ng'ambo	ng'ombe
ng'ofu	-ng'ong'ona

(b) The letters **ng** (without the apostrophe) represent two sounds, as they do in English: *finger*, *hunger*, *longer*, etc. You will need to get used to having these sounds together at the beginning of a word. Try these:

ngamia	ngoma
ngoja	nguvu

(c) The letters **ny** represent only one sound. Have a look at the two English examples in the second list of consonants. If you know any French you can use the sound represented by **gn** in *magnifique* and *agneau*. Remember, **ny** is never a separate syllable.