

Non-canonical noun phrase agreement in Bantu

Lutz Marten

University of London, SOAS - UK

Canonically, Bantu nominal structure consists of a nominal class prefix and a nominal stem, and within the noun phrase, dependent nominals such as demonstratives, numerals, and possessives agree with the noun class of the head noun. However, the agreement relation cannot be analysed as simple copying of the class feature of the head noun. Agreement with complex numerals (1) shows that agreement is not computed for the whole numeral with respect to the class of the head noun (class 8), but that the numeral 'one' (-moja) agrees with the corresponding singular class of the head noun (class 7). The analysis of agreement in these cases needs to make reference to the underlying structure of the noun class system, and not just to the noun class of the head noun.

- (1) *vi-siwa kumi na ki-moja* [Swahili]
8-beds ten and 7-one
'eleven islands'

Another case of non-canonical agreement is found with nouns with double noun-class prefixes, which are often found with derivational uses of the noun class system, but also frequently with locative noun-class prefixes. In some languages, in these cases agreement is possible with either the locative noun class, or with the non-locative, original noun class (2 and 3).

- (2) *mu-nganda mu-myandi* [Bemba]
18-9.house 18-9.my
'in my house'
- (3) *mu-nganda yandi*
18-9.house 9.my
'in my house'

The different agreement choices are related to different pragmatic meanings: Locative agreement places emphasis on the possessive relation, while agreement with the original class (class 9) places emphasis on the nominal referent. The analysis of these examples thus has to make reference to the internal structure of the locative nouns, and to explain the pragmatic effects derived.

The paper discusses examples of non-canonical agreement in the noun phrase, and provides an outline of how these cases can be analysed.