

Noun morphophonemics and noun class restructuring: the case of Meru gender 11/10 restructuring

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The paper will seek to address the plural forms of class 11/10 nouns in Meru dialects. These are Bantu dialects spoken in the eastern province of Kenya.

The dialects form the plural forms in this class in various ways. That is, there is a lot of restructuring of the plural forms in the dialects depending on how the speakers perceive the words. Sometimes the entire word is treated as a root and in other cases the word is considered to have two parts; a prefix and a stem. Forms that are considered to have a prefix and a stem can be further restructured. In some cases the singular forms have an underlying stem initial palatal consonant which is deleted in the surface phonetic form but surfaces in the plural, and in other cases the words are treated as having a stem initial vowel. Interesting to note is the fact that this noun class restructuring can occur in the same dialect whereby a single lexical form has its plural realized in two or three different ways.

The paper will, therefore, not only seek to discuss different ways of forming plural in this gender but also outline clearly the motivations behind such changes.