

Object a/symmetry and animacy hierarchy in Herero (Bantu, R31)

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In a sentence with an applicative verb in Herero, only the applied object can be placed immediately after the verb, the place for the primary object. Therefore, Herero is not a "symmetric language," in which both the direct object and the applied object can be licensed the primary object, but an "asymmetric language", in which only one of them (usually the applied object) can be licensed the primary object.

However, because of the animacy hierarchy, if the direct object is [+human], not only the applied object but also the direct object can be placed immediately after the verb, that is, the direct object is also licensed as the primary object.

Although [+human] has priority, and the direct object can be located immediately after the verb because of it, it does not mean [+human] has exclusive priority. Interestingly the applied object still maintains the license of the primary object. Therefore, the sentence behaves like a symmetric language. Moreover, it might result to create ambiguous sentences. For example, the same sentence can mean both "I call children for the teacher" and "I call the teacher for children" because either object can be placed at immediate after verb.

This presentation discusses how animacy hierarchy interacts with the other criteria for determining the primary object in double-object sentences in Herero, especially in applicatives.