



TYPES OF SEMANTIC AGREEMENT IN BANTU

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- The noun class system is more clearly semantically grounded in the grammar (agreement) than in the lexicon (gender assignment)
- Semantic agreement versus syntactic agreement
- Semantic agreement has been more or less synonymous with animate agreement in Bantu studies
- Goal of this talk: show that at least five types of semantic agreement can be distinguished:

Five types of semantic agreement

1. Animate agreement
2. Superclassing
3. Basic level term agreement
4. Evaluative agreement
5. Locative agreement

Swahili (Wald 1975: 271, 272)

- a. **ki**-le hi-su, ni-li-**ki**-ona
7.PP-DEM 7.NP-knife 1SG-PST-7.OM-see
‘That knife, I saw it.’
- b. **Yu**-le ki-boko, ni-li-**mw**-ona
1.PP-DEM 7.NP-hippo 1SG-PST-1.OM-see
‘That hippo, I saw it.’

- found especially in zone K, and in coastal languages of zones G and E
- some variation between languages concerning
 - the obligatoriness of its application and
 - the agreement targets that are involved

The agreement hierarchy (Corbett 1979)

attributive < predicate < relative pronoun < personal pronoun

NB. Animate agreement is not to be confounded with gender assignment based on animacy in reduced noun class systems.

	SG	PL
1/2	mo-	ba-
1a	∅-	
3/4	mo-	mi-
5/6	li-	ma-
7/8	e-	bi-
7a	ki-	
9/10	∅-	ba-
11	lo-	
14	bo-	
15	ko-	

Kinshasa Lingala

agreement only on the verb

- animate SG: a-
- animate PL: ba-
- inanimate: e-

Hierarchical organisation of class markers

typically:

- default (non-human) entity: class 7
- default human entity: class 1
- default location: class 16
- (general default: class 9)

Where?

- pronominals (indefinite pronouns, interrogatives, ...)
- agreement with conjoined NPs
- other types of “enforced” agreement

Luba (van den Eynde & Mufuta 1994: 102)

a. **apa** tu-di **ku-n-zubu** or **eku** tu-di **ku-n-zubu**
16.DEM 1PL-COP 17-9-house 17.DEM 1PL-COP 17-9-house

‘Here, we are towards the house’

b. **apa** tu-di **mu-n-zubu** or **emu** tu-di **mu-n-zubu**

‘Here, we are in the house’

c. **apa** tu-di **pa-n-zubu**

‘Here, we are on the house’

superclassing

Luba (van den Eynde & Mufuta 1994: 102)

- a. *emu tu-di ku-n-zubu
- b. *emu tu-di pa-n-zubu
- c. *eku tu-di mu-n-zubu
- d. *eku tu-di pa-n-zubu

superclassing: among the locative classes, 16 is dominant

In Kirundi (and Kikuyu, ...) proper names and suppletive kinship terms trigger the same agreement pattern as **the basic level term** that expresses their **categorical presuppositional meaning**.

urukara 'black' (11); umuuntu 'person' (1); imbwá 'dog' (9)

b. Rukara **a-rikó** **a-rafuungura**

Rukara **1-is** **1-eating**

'Rukara (a person) is eating.'

c. Rukara **i-rikó** **i-iraryá**

Rukara **9-is** **9-eating**

'Rukara (a dog) is eating.'

u-muu-ntu 'person' (cl. 1); i-nká 'cow' (cl. 9)

a. nyina a-raryamye

mother 1-is.sleeping

'His/her mother is sleeping.' (person)

b. nyina i-raryamye

mother 9-is.sleeping

'His/her mother is sleeping.' (cow)

This is NOT a type of animate agreement:

u-rú-uzi ‘river’, class 11

Maragaraazi **ru**-gabanya **u**-bu-Ha n **ú**-bu-Ruúndi

Maragaraazi **XI**-separates **AU**-14-Buha from **AU**-14-Burundi

‘The Maragarazi separates Buha from Burundi.’

(Meeussen 1959: 189)

u-kw-êzi ‘month’, class 15

Kigarama **gu**-kwirikira munyoonyó

December **XV**-follows November

‘December follows November’

This type of agreement defines a grammatical category of Proper Names in languages like Kirundi.



Ndengeleko (Ström 2013: 163, 195)

a. m-bésa a-úu

10-hare 2-white

‘white hares’

animate agreement

b. ka-pésa ka-úu

12-hare 12-white

‘little white hare’

evaluative agreement

Evaluative agreement overrides animate agreement.



Swahili

- a. **Yu**-le ki-pofu, ni-li-**mw**-on-a
1-DEM 7-blind 1SG-PST-1OM-see-FV
'That blind man, I saw him.'
- b. **Ki**-le ki-pofu, ni-li-**ki**-on-a
7-DEM 7-blind 1SG-PST-7OM-see-FV
'That tiny blind man, I saw him.'

NB. Interesting derivation!

NB2. for Wald (1975) and others (b) = syntactic agreement,
BUT random exception on animate agreement, to be described
in semantic terms anyway

- very prominent, overriding
- but hard to observe, since evaluative meanings are derived by change in noun class
- independent evidence for the existence of evaluative agreement?



Yes, with proper names in languages like Kirundi!

a. Taama **a**-raaje

Taama **1**-arrives

‘Taama arrives’

basic level agreement

b. Taama **ki**-raaje

Taama **7**-arrives

‘(big/horrible) Taama arrives.’

evaluative agreement

c. Taama **ka**-raaje

Taama **12**-arrives

‘(little/dear) Taama arrives.’

evaluative agreement

Again, hard to notice, due to the existence of locative classes
But unmistakably existent in languages that mark locatives
uniquely by means of a suffix:

Bondei (G24) (Grégoire 1975: 192)

- a. nyumba-ni mw-ako (18-2SG.POS) ‘in your house’
- b. nyumba-ni ha-kwe (16-3SG.POS) ‘close to his house’
- c. nyumba-ni kw-etu (17-1PL.POS) ‘at our house’

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Exhaustive typology?

Issues for grammatical analysis:

- Do not confound proper name agreement with animate agreement
- Do not confound evaluative agreement with animate agreement
- Do not confound evaluative agreement with syntactic agreement
- Do not confound animacy-based gender assignment with animate agreement