
Individuation as a Processing cue in Zulu agreement

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The research demonstrates the adjustments required in material creation and the unpredictability of the expected results when applying an ‘off-the-shelf’ psycholinguistic paradigm devised and extensively replicated in English for a common cross-linguistic phenomenon (subject-verb number agreement) to a language from Bantu language family, Zulu.

Standard accounts of Bantu Noun Classes compare them to grammatical gender systems in Indo-European languages, where pairs of singular and plural NCs are analysed as belonging to the same Gender (e.g., Gender A, B, C, D..., Carstens 1991; Corbett 1991). In contrast, Contini-Morava (2000) argues number in Bantu languages is not a binary opposition, but rather reflects scalar degrees of *Individuation*, ranging from highly individuated discrete objects to least individuated masses.

In this self-paced reading study, we used agreement attraction paradigm (Wagers et al. 2009) to investigate (a)symmetry in number pairings of Bantu NCs when the attractor noun is embedded in a subject relative clause (N=120 native Zulu), (1). We contrasted the highly individuated NC-pairings (NC3–NC4) argued to align with traditional SG-PL, and those which exhibit asymmetry (NC5–NC6): one pair member (NC6) is less individuated and functions as a grammatical marker of plurality, and the other (NC5) is more individuated.

(1) Attraction agreement:

Umbesen_{NC3} okufanele uqaqe imithungo_{NC4} izohlanzwa_{SM4} ngendwangu.

"The knife that is supposed to cut the stitches will be cleaned with a cloth."

Preliminary results are supportive of *Individuation* but also question the nature of agreement effect as semantic illusion. Our study urges for development of resources (corpora, standardized tests, normed materials) for material design support, as well as participants’ acquaintance with the experimental setup to eliminate task related effects.

References: • Carstens, V. (1991). The morphology and syntax of determiner phrases in Kiswahili. *PhD*, UCLA. • Contini-Morava, E. (1997). Noun classification in Swahili. In R.K. Herbert (ed.), *African linguistics at the crossroads*. Cologne: Rudiger Köppe Verlag, 599–623. • Corbett, G.G. (1991). *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. • Wagers, M.W., Lau, E.F., & C. Phillips (2009). Agreement attraction in comprehension: Representations and processes. *Journal of Memory and Language* 61(2), 206–237.