

Abstract MIT LingLunch talk 8 December

The AWSOM and RANDOM in Bantu object marking

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Many Bantu languages mark objects on the verb by a prefix agreeing in noun class:

- (1) N-a-va-et-eaa anca mUhUmba. [Nyaturu, Hualde 1989]
1SG.SM-PAST-2OM-bring-APPL 2.girls 1.boy
'I brought the girls a boy.'

However, object marking (OM) shows fascinating microvariation across Bantu, along the following parameters:

1. the **nature** of the OM: doubling / non-doubling
(OM and DP can co-occur in the same domain in Nyaturu = doubling);
2. the **behaviour in ditransitives**: asymmetric / symmetric
(only benefactive and not theme can be OM-ed in Nyaturu = asymmetric);
3. the **number** of object markers allowed: one/two/multiple
(Nyaturu is restricted to one).

This talk maps the parameter settings of 50+ Bantu languages, revealing two gaps:

Asymmetry Wants Single Object Marking correlation (AWSOM)

→ Almost no language has multiple markers that are doubling.

Relation between Asymmetry and Non-Doubling Object Marking (RANDOM)

→ No language has non-doubling asymmetrical object marking.

I argue that these gaps are in fact not random, but can be understood as obligatory marking of salience, in the form of a [Person] feature in either the non-clausal domain (doubling) or the clausal domain (symmetry).