

Reconciling Animacy and Noun Class in Bantu

The goal of this talk (based on joint-work with Claire Halpert) is to understand the relationship between animacy and the noun class system of Bantu languages. Combining facts from various phenomena across the family that are sensitive to animacy, including anti-agreement, animacy override, and agreement resolution under conjunction, I argue that the featural properties of Bantu nouns directly encode the person-animacy hierarchy. I show that all nouns, regardless of the noun class expressed on the surface, are underlyingly specified for a core noun class, which encodes whether a noun is a human (class 1/2), non-human animate (class (9/10), or inanimate (class 7/8). The main proposal is that core noun class is morphologically encoded by the final vowel found on many Bantu nouns, and syntactically encoded by the nominal categorizing head *n* using the features [+/-Animate] and [+/-Human]. Furthermore, core noun class can be obscured by the stacking of multiple *n*'s within the nominal spine, creating a mismatch between the morphophonological expression of class within a noun versus the expression in agreement.