1 Case study: Swati

Let’s examine the noun class system of Swati (Ziervogel and Mabuza 1976; Rycroft 1995).

1.1 Nouns and their classes

Class 1: *umu-, um-

- People and personal deverbatives: *umfana* “boy”; *umfati* “woman”; *umakhi* “builder”, cf. *-akha* “build”; *umelusi* “herder”, cf. *-elusa* “herd”.

Class 2: *(e)ba-, be-, b-

- *(e)bafana* “boys” *(e)bakhi* “builders”,
- Class 2 is the plural for class 1: *umhambi/bahambi* “traveller/travellers”, *umuntfu/bantfu* “person/people”.

Class 1a: *u-, (u-)* Words in which *u-* prefix is obligatory. (There aren’t very many of these.)

- Terms of family relation: *uyihlo* “(your) father”, *uyise* “(his/her/its/their) father”, *unyoko* “your mother”.

Words in which *u-* is optional:

- Terms of family relation: *make* “my mother”, *malume* “maternal uncle”, *gogo* “grandmother”.
- Personal names: *Mswati* the name of a Swati king, *Velakuphi* a girl’s name, *Vusi* a boy’s name. Also, a variety of things resembling personal names employing prefixes meaning “unmarried girl”, “mother of”, etc.: *laHhanisi* “daughter of Hhanisi”.

1
• Names of mountains, riviers, hills, and spruits, which are personified: *Nali* a mountain, *Bhunya* a river.

• Animal names beginning with *lo-*: *logwaja* “hare”, *lohheya* “hawk”.

• Names [*sic*] derived with prefix *ma-* denoting a habit: *makhalelafutsi* “cry-baby”, cf. *khalela* “cry for” and *futsi* “often”.

• Nouns meaning “so-and-so”: *Ntokanje*, *Ntasika*.

• *Bani* “who”.

• Many loanwords: *bhekeni* “bacon”, *bhiya* “beer”, *semende* “cement”.

Class 2a: *bo-*

• This class is used as a plural of class 1a: *malume/bomalume* “maternal uncle/uncles”, *bani/bobani* “who (sing.)/who (pl.)”, *bhanana/bobhanana* “banana/bananas”.

• With personal names and terms of relation, class 2a also indicates “and company, and companions”: *bolaZwane* “Mrs. Zwane and companions”.

Class 3: *umu-, um-

• Natural phenomena: *umlilo* “fire”, *umfula* “river”, *umtfunti* “shadow”.

• Trees, shrubs, and grasses: *umhlanga* “reed”, *umkhiwa* “wild fig tree”, *umhlonhlo* “euphorbia”.

• Mountains and rivers: *uMlembe* a mountain, *uMlumati* a river.

• Body parts: *umlente* “leg”, *umhlane* “back”.

• Customs and objects concerned with them: *umcwasho* “reed dance”, *umbutfo* “member of a regiment”.

• Objects concerned with building: *umcolo* “wattle framework of a hut”, *umnyango* “door”.

• Foodstuffs (usually liquids): *umhidvo* “unfermented beer”, *umlata* “cream”.

• Useful articles: *umgwembe* “wooden dish”, *umukhwa* “knife”.

• Deverbatives:
  - *umtfwalo* “load”, cf. *-tfwala* “carry”;
  - *umfanekiso* “example”, cf. *-fanekisa* “exemplify”.

Class 4: *imi-, im-

• The plural for class 3: *umuti/imiti* “village/villages”, *umfula/imifula* “river/rivers”.

2
Class 5: li-

- One of a pair, as in parts of the body: *liphahla* “twin”, *liso* “eye”, *libele* “breast”.
- Fruit (which resembles two halves): *litsanga* “pumpkin”, *linumbela* “wild plum”.
- One from a group: *linyeva* “thorn”, *litfumbu* “intestine”, *litje* “stone”.
- Parts of a village: *lidladla* “kitchen”, *lilawu* “boy’s hut”, *litiko* “hearth”.
- Humans with special characteristics, including individuals from nationalities and tribes: *lijele* “young boy”, *lidlabha* “careless person”, *liShangane* “a Tsonga”, *liBhunu* “an Afrikaner”.
- Objects of adornment: *lihiya* “loin cloth”, *lidlabe* “headdress of feathers”.
- Foodstuffs and drinks: *lijingi* “kind of sour porridge”, *libhedla* “spinach”.
- Birds and animals: *luvukutfu* “olive pigeon”, *lisakabuli* “widow bird”, *lidvuba* “zebra”.
- Expanses and flat objects: *litsafa* “plateau”, *licembe* “leaf”.
- Deverbatives, usually referring to the product of the action of the verb from which it derives: *libito* “name”, cf. *-bita* “call”; *lilobolo* “dowry”, cf. *-lobola* “pay dowry”.
- Loanwords: *libhantji* “coat” < Afrikaans “baadjie”, *libhisikiti* “biscuit”.

Class 6: ema-

- The regular plural for class 5: *liphahla/emaphahla* “twin/twins”, *lihombe/emahombe* “shoulders”.
- Collectives and liquids which have no corresponding singular: *emasi* “sour milk”, *emafutsa* “fat”.
- A plural class for some nouns of classes 9 and 9a: *inkhosi (9)/emakhosi* “chief/chiefs”, *indvodza (9)/emadvodza* “man/men”, *ibhasi (9a)/emabhasi* “bus/buses”.

Class 7: si-, s-

- Flat objects: *sibuya* “threshing floor”, *sitja* “plate”.
- People with special characteristics: *sikhulu* “district headman”, *sidzandazane* “young girl”.
- Phenomena concerned with nature: *sidvuli* “antheap”, *sigodzi* “district”.
- Objects of adornment: *sidziya* “bride’s apron”, *sidlodlo* “headring”.
- Parts of the body: *sifutsa* “udder”, *sibele* “breast”.

3
• Foodstuffs: *sijeza* “pumpkin porridge”, *sicaba* “ground mealie grains”.

• Plants (or patches/orchards of them): *sikhutane* a kind of gourd, *sinwati* “wild grape”; *sibhatala* “sweet-potato patch”, cf. *bhatata* “sweet potato”.

• Behavior, language, and cultures: *siSwati* “Swati language and culture”.

• Animals, birds, etc.: *sibhutikati* “she-goat”, *sikhova* “owl”.

• Deverbatives:  
  *simila* “cancer”, cf. *-mila* “grow”,  
  *simo* “character”, cf. *-ma* “stand”,  
  *sihlalo* “seat”, cf. *-hlala* “sit”,  
  *sisebenti* “employee”, cf. *-sebenta* “work”,  
  *siboshwa* “convict”, cf. *-boshwa* “be bound”.

• Loanwords: *sitofu* “stove”, *sitolo* “store”.

**Class 8: ti-, t-**

• The plural for class 7: *sitja/titja* “plate/plates”, *salukati/talukati* “old woman/women”.

• Some nouns that have no singular: *tibi* “dirt, weeds”, *tibiliboco* “delicacies”.

**Class 9: in-, im-**

• Animals, birds, and reptiles: *inja* “dog”, *indlovu* “elephant”, *inshe* “ostrich”. *ingwenya* “crocodile”, *imamba* “python”.

• Plants: *inhlabo* kind of aloe.

• People with outstanding characteristics: *inkhosi* “chief”, *injinga* “rich person”.

• Parts of the body: *indlebe* “ear”, *inhlityo* “heart”.

• Foodstuffs: *imbasha* “roasted mealie grains”, *incheke* “cooked pumpkin”.

• Articles of use: *imbisha* “dagga pipe”, *incabule* “sandal”.

• “Specific objects” *indlu* “hut, house”, *imbulugwane* “pointed head”.

• Rivers, mountains, etc.: *iNgogo* a river, *iNhlwayela* a mountain.

• Deverbatives:  
  *infombi* “girl”, cf. *-tfomba* “reach puberty”;  
  *imbongi* “one who says praises”, cf. *-bonga* “praise”; *imfundvo* “lesson”, cf. *-fundza* “learn”

• Loanwords: *indishi* “dish”, *ingadze* “garden”.

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4
Class 9a: *i-*
- Plural is class 10 if the root begins with a nasal: *imoto/timoto* (10) “car/cars”, *inyalitsi/tinyalitsi* (10) “needle/needles”.
- Otherwise the plural is class 6: *ibhasi/emabhasi* (6) “bus/buses”, *ikheli/emakheli* (6) “address/addresses”.

Class 10: *tin-, tim-*
- The plural of class 9: *intfo/tintfo* “thing/things”, *imamba/timamba* “mambas”.
  Sometimes the plural means “kinds of”: *inyama/tinyama* “meat/kinds of meat”.
- The plural of class 11: *lukhuni/tinkhuni* “wood/pieces of wood”, *lutsi/tintsi* “stick/sticks”.
- Some nouns that don’t have a corresponding singular: *tindzala* “ruins”, *tindzevu* “whiskers”.

Class 11: *lu-, lw-, l-*
- A number of nouns with no corresponding plural: *lubisi* “milk”, *lukhula* “weeds”.
- Longish objects: *luswati* “switch”, *lucingo* “telephone wire”.
- Body parts of animals: *lunwele* “hair”, *lukhakhayi* “skull”.
- Articles of use: *lubhaca* “grass torch”, *ludziwo* “clay pot”.
- Collectives: *lujilo* “beehive”, *lutswayi* “salt”.
- Deverbative living beings:
  *lupuya* “poor person”, cf. *-phuya* “be poor”;
  *luhlanya* “crazy person”, cf. *-hlanya* “be mad”.
- Living beings: *luswane* “baby”, *lunwabu* “chameleon”.

Class 14: *bu-, tj(w)-, b-*
- Abstract nouns:
  *bubi* “badness”, cf. *-bi* “bad”;
  *bupuya* “poverty”, cf. *-phuya* “be poor”;
- Collectives: *buhlalu* “beads”, *tjwala* “beer”.
- Animals: *budzatja* “wild dog”, *bubhibhi* “meerkat”.

Class 15: *ku-, kw-, k-*
- Infinitives: *kutsandza* “to love”, *kungatsandzi* “to not love”, *kwandza* “to increase”.
Class 16: **pha-**
- Residue found in some adverbs: *phandle* “outside”, *phansi* “underneath”.

Class 17: **ku-**
- Residue found in some adverbs: *kudvute* “near”, *kuphi* “where”.
- As a sort of prepositional phrase with nouns of classes 1, 2, 1a, and 2a: *kubabe* “to/from father”, *kumuntfu* “to/from a person”.

Class 18: **mu-**
- In couple of adverbs: *mshiya loyi* “this side”.

### 1.2 Questions

a. How predictable is this system?

- Are there any sorts words whose noun class can be reasonably predicted by their semantics?
- In which noun classes can you make a prediction about a semantic property of a word that belongs to it?
- How does the degree of predictability compare to that of gender in European or Semitic languages?

b. Consider classes 1 and 3. Both use the prefix *um-/umu-*. Why do you imagine we don’t jump lump these into one noun class? The same question holds for classes 15 and 17.

c. Consider the nouns *imoto* “car” and *inyalitsi* “needle”. According to the description, these belong to noun class 9a. How do we know that they’re not class 9? Does it matter?
2 Issues of interest in noun classes

- How do we define a noun class?
  - Internal morphology?
  - Agreement? What if agreement pattern depends on the agreeing part of speech?

(1) Swahili

a. \[ \text{Barua yangu] i- me- fik- a.}\n   9.letter 9.my \hspace{1cm} 9.SBJ- PERF.- arrive- FV
   \text{“My letter has arrived.”}\n
b. \[ \text{Mwalimu wangu] a- me- fik- a.}\n   1.teacher 1.my \hspace{1cm} 1.SBJ- PERF.- arrive- FV
   \text{“My letter has arrived.”}\n
c. \[ \text{Mama yangu] a- me- fik- a.}\n   9.mother 9.my \hspace{1cm} 1.SBJ- PERF.- arrive- FV
   \text{“My letter has arrived.”}\n
d. \[ \text{Ng’ombe wangu] a- me- fik- a.}\n   9.letter 1.my \hspace{1cm} 1.SBJ- PERF.- arrive- FV
   \text{“My letter has arrived.”}\n
- Problems in classification: 1a/3a, 1/1a.

- Agreement in locatives

(2) Swahili

a. \[ \text{Juu yake pa- li- ku- w- a na kitambaa....}\n   \text{above 9.its 16.SBJ- PST- EPEN- be- FV with 7.cloth}\n   \text{“On top of him/it/her was a cloth....”}\n
b. \[ \text{mjini wa Soweto} \text{ (53 Google hits for mjini wa)}\n   \text{3.town- LOC 3.of Soweto}\n   \text{“in the town of Soweto”}\n
c. \[ \text{mjini mwa Myombekere} \text{ (13 Google hits for mjini mwa)}\n   \text{3.town- LOC 18.of MMyombekere}\n   \text{“in the town of Myombekere”}\n

• Class and gender

(3) Dutch

a. Zelfs een slim- e man heeft zijn problemen.
   even a smart- COM man has his/its problems
   “Even a smart man has his problems.”

b. Zelfs een slim- e vrouw heeft haar problemen.
   even a smart- COM woman has her problems.
   “Even a smart woman has her problems.”

c. Zelfs een slim boek heeft zijn problemen.
   even a smart book has his/its problems
   “Even a smart book has its problems.”

d. Zelfs een slim meisje heeft haar problemen.
   even a smart girl has her problems
   “Even a smart girl has her problems.”

• Augments/preprefixes(initial vowels)

(4) Zulu

a. Ngi- fun- a a- maswidi.
   1S.SBJ- want- FV DET- 6.sweets
   “I want some sweets.”

   NEG 1S.SBJ- want- NEG DET- 6.sweets
   “I don’t want (any) sweets.”

   NEG 1S.SBJ- want- NEG 6.sweets
   “I don’t want any sweets!” (might express annoyance)

• Disappearance and emergence of class systems.

• Infinitives: Why does this figure in the noun class system?

• Default classes:
  – Where do borrowed words go?
  – Expletive constructions: it seems that..., it is estimated that...
  – What does what agree with?
  – Existential expressions: there appeared..., there was...
• The conjunction of nouns.

(5) Zulu rules for conjoined subjects (adapted from Nyembezi (1970))

a. When the conjuncts refer to people, class 2 (ba-) subject agreement may be used.

b. The first noun may determine the concord.

c. If nouns indicating people and animals or things precede the verb, it is usual to start with the noun indicating people, and it is that noun which determines agreement.

d. However, the noun indicating animal or thing might determine agreement if it precedes in word order the noun for person. With these sentences, some speakers might prefer to use class 17 concord (ku-), which is a concord of impersonal reference. However, great care must be exercised in the use of this concord with people, as it might be derogatory.

e. Animals only: concord of the class of nouns if they belong to a single class. If they do not belong to the same class, class 17 (ku-) or class 10 (zi-) may be used, preferably class 17 (ku-).

f. Things only: Class 17 agreement (ku-) may be used.

3 Reading

The reading for this week is Katamba (2003).
Reminder: The course website is at http://www.fizzylogic.com/users/bulbul/bantucourse.

References


