

Conjoined subjects and the theory of gender/class

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1. Explaining agreement failures with Bantu conjoined subjects. It is standard practice in the Bantu linguistics literature to label singular and plural (s/pl) noun classes distinctly, by means of a numbering system dating to Meinhoff (1906) (see the Swahili examples in (1)).

- (1) a. m-toto/wa-toto b. m-ti/mi-ti c. gari/ma-gari etc.
 1-child/2-child 3-tree/4-tree 5car/6-car
 ‘child/ren’ ‘tree/s’ ‘car/cars’

But odd/even class pairings are commonly viewed as s/pl of a smaller number of genders, as in (2) (Carstens 1991, Corbett & Mtenje 1987 a.o.). For Carstens (1991), noun class prefixes spell out number+gender as in (3), after the functional head Number contributes a s/pl value.

(2) Bantu Genders (Carstens 1991)

Gender A: stems of Classes 1/2
 Gender B: stems of Classes 3/4

Gender C: stems of Classes 5/6
 etc.

(3) Sample Spell-Out rule for Swahili noun class prefixes: [Sing] ↔ [m-] / N
[Gender A]

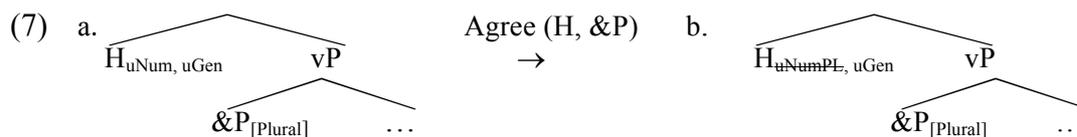
This approach is challenged in Taraldsen et al (2018), based on the fact that Xhosa conjoined singulars require default or semantic agreement, even if they are of the same class (4a)-(5a) and hence each conjunct, if pluralized, would control an identical plural agreement (4b)-(5b).

- (4) a. u-m-bhingqo no-m-nqathe **zi**/***i**-se-tafile-ni. [Xhosa; Taraldsen et al 2018:9]
 3-3-skirt and-3-3-carrot SM8/* SM4-table-LOC
 ‘A skirt and a carrot are on the table.’
- b. I-mi-bhingqo/i-mi-nqathe **i**-se-tafile-ni.
 4-4-skirt 4-4-carrot SM4-table-LOC
 ‘The skirts/the carrots are on the table.’
- (5) a. U-m-gewu no-m-lwelwe **ba**/***i**-sebenza ndawonye.
 3-3-criminal and.3-3-cripple SM2/* SM4-work together
 ‘A criminal and a cripple are working together.’
- b. I-mi-gewu /i-mi-lwelwe **i**-sebenza ndawonye.
 4-4-criminal/4-4-cripple SM-work together
 ‘The criminals/cripples work together’

On this basis, Taraldsen et al (2018) reject the view that s/pl pairings share gender features, arguing instead that each class is a distinct and unrelated gender added by a null specifier.

I claim that (4a)/(5a) do not threaten the viability of the shared gender analysis of pairs of Bantu classes, because the failure of conjoined singulars to control expected plural gender agreement is also found in languages with more canonical gender systems, and has received an effective explanation. Marušič et al (2007) and Boskovic (2009) discuss similar phenomena in Serbo-Croatian (= SC; see (6)), and propose that Conjunct Phrase (&P) has number features only. When uPhi on a head H probes &P for number and gender, it acquires the plural value alone (7). Default resolution rules therefore come into play even when the genders of conjuncts match, yielding *ba-* or *zi-* in Xhosa and masculine in SC (6).

- (6) Jedno tele i jedno pašče su juče *prodana/√prodani [SC]
 one calf.**neut** and one dog.**neut** are yesterday ***sold.pl.neut**/√sold.pl.masc
 ‘A dog and a calf were sold yesterday.’

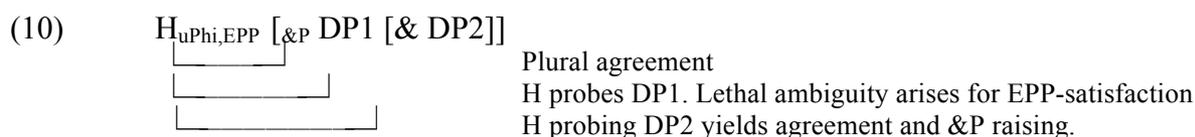


Mitchley (2015) reports that when Xhosa plurals of mismatching classes are conjoined, the dominant pattern is last conjunct agreement (LCA), for speakers in her study. Hierarchical sensitivity is clear in (9), ruling out an account based on linear proximity.

(8) A-ba-pheki ne-zi-caka zi-ya-pheka. [Xhosa; Mitchley 2015:117]
 2-2-cook and.8-8-servants SM8-DJ-cook
 ‘The cooks and the servants are cooking.’

(9) A-ma-qanda nezi-tya z-a-ba-fazi zi-/*ba-nyamelele. [Xhosa]
 6-6-eggs and.8-8-plates 8-of.2-2women 8SA-/2SA-be.missing
 ‘The eggs and the women’s plates are gone.’

Taraldsen et al consider only singulars; their approach yields no insight into (8). But LCA follows from the absence of [gender] on &P and other aspects of Boskovic's (2009) approach (see (10)). $H_{[uNum, uGen, EPP]}$ probes &P and, via Multiple Agree, DP1 for gender iff DP1 matches &P in plurality. Since DP1 can extract (adopting Safir, Sikuku, & Baker (2013) for (11)a; see (11)b), lethal ambiguity re: whether &P or DP1 should satisfy EPP causes H to try again, probing DP2. DP2 can't raise, so Agree (H, &P, DP2) yields no problem; &P raises.



(11) a. U-m-ntwana u-bon-ene no-m-fundi.
 1-1-child SC1-see- recip and.1-1-student
 ‘The child and the student saw each other.’
 [Lit: the child saw each other and/with the student]

b. [TP [DP_{sg} child] [T...[_{vP} [&P_{pl} <child> [ne student]] [_v v [_{VP} see each other]]]]]

In sum, default agreement with conjoined singulars of the same Bantu class is compatible with treating odd/even pairs of classes as s/pl of single gender, and striking parallels to conjunct agreement phenomena in languages like SC support it. Noun class is gender, and should have the same locus as in other languages – not in an added specifier, but on *n/N*.

2. Default agreement and the semantics of gender. (4)a, (5)a motivate default rules: conjoined [+human]_{sing} → class 2 agr; conjoined [-human]_{sing} → class 8 agr. For Mitchley (2015), Corbett & Mtenje (1987) classes 2 and 8 have semantic [+human] and [-human] features respectively. But conjoined class 1/1a nouns resist the default rule, controlling class 2 agr whether human or not (12)a, and conjoined class 7 humans control class 8 agr (12)b.

(12) a. U-loliwe no-matshini ba-/*zi-se galaji-ni. [Xhosa]
 1a-train and.1a-machine SM2-/*SM8-be garage-LOC
 ‘The train and the machine are in the garage.’

b. I-sanuse ne-s-angoma zi-/*ba-sebenza ndawonye.
 7-7diviner and.7-7-healer SM8-/* SM2-work together
 ‘The diviner and the healer work together.’

Modifying Boskovic (2009) I propose that the gender features of both conjuncts always copy onto the probe, even where the conjuncts are singular. Following Kramer (2015), instances of a given gender may be *i* or *u*. An impoverishment rule deletes *u*gender features that mismatch each other or the plurality of &P, but cannot distinguish *i* from *u* varieties of a single gender. As a result, these gender features cannot delete, yielding the exceptional patterns in (12).