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The increasing importance of animacy in the agreement systems of Ndengeleko and other Southern Coastal Bantu languages

Eva-Marie Ström

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper¹ is to describe and analyze ongoing grammatical changes in the noun class system of the Bantu language Ndengeleko. Semantic considerations, specifically related to animacy, are of increasing importance in the choice of agreement. Also, there is flexibility in the choice of singular/plural pairings. Based on findings regarding animacy and this flexibility, it is claimed that noun class 6 in Ndengeleko is of derivational character. Moreover, a comparison regarding animacy distinctions is made with other southern coastal languages of Tanzania and Mozambique.

Ndengeleko is a noun class language. In most Bantu languages, the noun class manifests itself by the use of a noun class prefix, and by the use of CLASS CONCORD (CC).² Each noun class triggers a set of concord markers on agreement targets.³

- (1) *di-bwa* *di-swanu* *di-ku-dia*
 5-dog 5-good 5-PRES-eat.FV
 ‘The good dog eats.’ (Petzell 2008: 48)

¹ I am grateful for comments from the audience of the 41st Annual Conference of African Languages (ACAL) in Toronto 2010, and from the audience of Humanities of the Lesser-Known in Lund 2010. I also thank Jouni Maho and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on this paper. All mistakes remain my own.

² I use the terminology AC (animate concord) and CC (class concord) following Wald (1975).

³ The abbreviations used in this paper are cl.1-18 = noun class number, CD = concord marker, FV = final vowel, LOC = locative, NCP = noun class prefix, OM = object marker, OPT = optative, P = plural, PERF = perfect, POSS = possessive, PRES = present, PROG = progressive, S = singular, SM = subject marker, SUBJ = subjunctive.

In the above example from Kagulu, the head noun *dibwa* ‘dog’ is a noun of class 5. Therefore, agreement on the adjective and verb is of class 5, as expected. ANIMATE CONCORD (AC), on the other hand, refers to the use of concords of noun classes 1 (singular) and 2 (plural) for nouns with animate referents, even when these nouns inherently belong to another noun class. That is to say, the semantics of the noun plays a more important role than the class to which the noun belongs when the head noun refers to a human being or an animal, as in the following Ndengeleko example (2). The head noun, from class 7 with a prefix *ki-*, refers to an animal. Therefore, the subject agreement marker on the verb is from class 1.

- (2) *ki-pumbugu* *a-yingii* *mu-limbwa*
 7-large croc 1SM-enter.PERF 18LOC-5.hole
 ‘The large crocodile entered into the hole.’

AC occurs in several Bantu languages, mainly along the east coast of central Africa (Wald 1975: 296). The languages closest to the coast exhibit the highest percentage of AC, while in areas further inland the percentage is much lower or non-existent. Apart from being of areal character, AC manifests itself in different ways in the languages concerned. Very few languages make use of it throughout, for example, AC for all animate nouns in all contexts requiring concord. In Matuumbi, for example, animate nouns in class 9 (which can have singular or plural reference) use the concord of class 1 in the singular, but the concord of class 9 when plural (Odden 1996: 31). Swahili, the most well-known language which exhibits AC, uses concords of classes 1 and 2 with all animate nouns, unless these are human relationship terms in attributive possessive constructions (Contini-Morava 2008). For each Bantu language which uses AC, there appears to be a specific set of rules for its application. Wald (1975) made a significant contribution in describing this phenomenon for the so-called North East Coastal Bantu languages (NECB). For the languages spoken in the coastal area to the south of Dar es Salaam, we know little about the specific rules of CC/AC concord. Maho (1999: 124) labels the phenomenon GAC (GENERAL ANIMATE CONCORD), and includes Matuumbi to the south in his study (as well as languages in completely different geographical areas such as Angola). He also notes (1999: 123), that the attested distribution is most probably an underestimation, as many grammars make no mention of the use of animate concord, possibly because it has been considered too colloquial or ‘irregular’ for mention.

Ndengeleko is under heavy pressure from Swahili, and from the general multilingual setting of coastal Tanzania. Intergenerational transmission is very low, making the future of the language look bleak indeed (Ström 2009). It is

therefore an urgent matter to describe the different aspects of Ndengeleko grammar, before competence in the language diminishes further. This paper contributes a description of the different nouns with human and animal referents in the language, the noun classes to which they belong and their behaviour in terms of agreement. It analyzes the differences in application of CC/AC for animate nouns, and claims that the reason for this variation is found in the area of derivation. Moreover, it gives a short comparison with certain other south-eastern Tanzanian languages, not included in previous studies of the CC/AC distinction. These languages all exhibit different behaviours in terms of CC/AC. What they have in common is a strong tendency to give more weight to the animate/inanimate distinction. This is in conflict with another tendency: to avoid breaking up the system of CC. To avoid this is more important with derived nouns, where the semantics of the class needs to be emphasized and where there is a clear noun class prefix. It is less important with nouns of class 9, which have either no prefix or an integrated nasal prefix. The languages solve this ‘conflict’ in different ways.

The Ndengeleko data presented here are based on fieldwork by the author in the Rufiji area of Tanzania. The data collection has been carried out during five fieldtrips in the period 2005–2011. Elicitation is the main source of data, but examples also come from different kinds of (spoken) text. The database in *Toolbox* includes tales, descriptions of how to carry out certain tasks, and a few dialogues. All data are also recorded. Nine speakers have been consulted, four women and five men of different ages. The daily use of Ndengeleko is limited, especially among younger speakers, and all are fluent in Swahili.

2. The Ndengeleko noun class system

Ndengeleko, like other Bantu languages, is a language in which gender distinctions play a prominent role. The nominal lexicon of Ndengeleko is divided into 16 categories, some of which have singular reference, others plural. Certain of these noun classes consist of, or include, mass nouns without a singular/plural counterpart. Nouns referring to animates, including humans, are found in most noun classes in Bantu languages in general. Humans are hereby concentrated in classes 1/2 and animals in 9/10 (Wald 1975: 272). This is also the case in Ndengeleko. In Table 1, an overview is given of the noun classes. Indication is made of which classes contain nouns with human (‘Hum’) and/or animal (‘Ani’) referents in the data.

Table 1: The Ndengeleko noun classes

Noun class	Prefix	Semantic domain	Hum	Ani	Example	Gloss
1	<i>mu-</i>	Human beings in the singular.	x		<i>mu-lwawa</i> [nnwawa]	‘woman’
2	<i>ba-/a-</i>	Human beings in the plural.	x		<i>a-lwawa</i>	‘women’
3	<i>mu-</i>	Miscellaneous nouns in singular. Also mass nouns.		x	<i>mu-kongo</i> [ɲkongo] <i>mu-kumbulu</i> [ɲkumbulu]	‘tree’ ‘baboon’
4	<i>mi-</i>	Nouns of class 3 in the plural.		x	<i>mi-kongo</i> <i>mi-kumbulu</i>	‘trees’ ‘baboons’
		Plural of derived class 5 nouns.	x	x	<i>mi-senzema</i>	‘big mosquitoes’
5	<i>li-</i>	Miscellaneous nouns in singular.			<i>li-pinga</i>	‘egg’
		Derived augmentative /derogative nouns.	x	x	<i>lii-lalu</i> ⁴ <i>li-senzema</i>	‘crazy person’ ‘big mosquito’
6	<i>ma-</i>	Plural of class 5. Also plural of other classes.			<i>ma-pinga</i> <i>ma-gulu</i>	‘eggs’ ‘legs’
		Mass nouns, liquids.			<i>ma-taa</i>	‘saliva’
7	<i>ki-</i>	Miscellaneous nouns in the singular.	x	x	<i>ki-biga</i> <i>ki-imbwi</i>	‘cooking pot’ ‘hyena’
		Humans with disabilities.			<i>ki-bubu</i>	‘mute person’

⁴ A number of class 5 nouns have a long prefix *lii-* instead of *li-*.

8	<i>i-</i>	Nouns of class 7 in the plural.	x	x	<i>i-biga</i> <i>i-imbwi</i>	‘cooking pots’ ‘hyenas’
		Plural of class 12 and also of other classes.			<i>i-senzema</i> <i>i-kwili</i>	‘small mosquitoes’ ‘dwarf mongooses’
9	<i>N</i> ⁵	Miscellaneous nouns, no difference between singular and plural. Animals. Humans with disabilities.	x	x	<i>N-gobo</i> [ŋgobo]	‘banana’
					<i>N-bugusu</i> [mbugusu]	‘deaf person’
		Plural of class 11.			<i>N-bau</i> [mbau]	‘ribs’
	<i>∅-</i>				<i>∅-oobi</i>	‘leopard’
11	<i>lu-</i>	Miscellaneous nouns in the singular.		x	<i>lu-bau</i> <i>lu-kwili</i>	‘rib’ ‘dwarf mongoose’
12	<i>ka-</i>	Diminutive nouns in the singular.	x	x	<i>ka-senzema</i>	‘small mosquito’
14	<i>(b)u-</i>	Mainly abstract nouns and names of territories.		x	<i>u-binye</i> <i>u-lufi</i>	‘sickness’ ‘shrimp’

⁵ *N* refers to a homorganic nasal, which causes an initial voiceless stem consonant to voice. The stem of *ngobo* ‘banana’, for example, is unknown and could be underlying *kobo*.

15	(k)u-	Verbal nouns.	<i>u-tyanga</i>	‘to walk’
16	<i>pa-</i>	Indications of place and time. Specific location.	<i>pa-ndu</i>	‘place’
17	<i>ku-</i>	Indications of place and time. General location.	<i>ku-ndu</i>	‘place’
18	<i>mu-</i>	Indications of place and time. Insideness.	<i>mu-ponguti</i> [mponguti]	‘in the bush’

Assignment of a noun to a class is based on a number of factors. There is a certain semantic core to the assignment system, as with all gender systems (Corbett 1991: 8). However, this semantic core is heavily blurred by numerous words in each noun class, which do not fit the possible semantic description of the noun class in question. Ndengeleko is no different from other Bantu languages in the semantic categorization of noun classes (for example: plants mainly in noun class 3; fruits and paired objects in noun class 5; long, thin objects in noun class 11). Therefore, the semantic core of each noun class is not included in the table. The interested reader is referred to attempts to make sense of this semantic categorization in other Bantu languages, for example Contini-Morava (1997) for Swahili. See also (Maho 1999: 63–99).

In spite of this semantic core, gender assignment is largely formal. It is based on the form of the noun class prefix, alternatively on the absence of such a prefix, and on the singular/plural pairing of noun classes. Some authors consider a pair of noun classes (1/2, 3/4) to be a gender, and not separate noun classes (Corbett 1991: 45–46). The problem with this is that some noun classes are not paired at all. Moreover, Ndengeleko is a good example of a Bantu language in which certain plural classes become ‘overused’, so that they can be combined with many singular noun classes. The flexibility of the singular/plural pairing is illustrated in Table 2, showing singular classes, and the corresponding plural classes. Noun class 14 might be more appropriately placed in the middle, as it contains mainly uncountable nouns. However, a plural is often possible, in different classes, and class 14 is therefore grouped with the singular classes. Classes 15 (verbal nouns) and 16–18 (locatives) do not take plurals and are not included in the table. A grouping of a singular class with a plural class which is less common is indicated with parentheses. It

should be noted that not all speakers accept this flexibility in the noun class system. So, the word for ‘nose’ is *mbulo* in class 9. This noun is singular as well as plural. However, some speakers accept an alternative plural *mipulo* in class 4, apparently for making the distinction between singular and plural more clear. Other speakers reject this plural as ungrammatical.

Table 2: Possible pairings of singular and plural noun classes in Ndengeleko

<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
1	2
3	4, (6)
5	4, 6
7	(4), (6), 8
9	(4), (6), 9
11	(4), (6), (8), 9
12	8
14	(4), (6), (8), (9)

Parentheses indicate plurals that are less common, or not accepted by all speakers.

It is likely that the less common plural forms in certain cases have a different semantic content than the more common plural form. For example, a speaker stated that the plural of *nyoka* ‘snake’ (cl.9) is *mayoka* (cl.6). However, another speaker explained that *mayoka* implies that the snakes are big and possibly many. Therefore, it is an augmentative plural rather than a plural of ‘snake’. The noun *nyoka* (cl.9) is singular as well as plural. Nevertheless, it is also evident that there is a strong tendency by some speakers to accept different plural forms without any change in meaning.

The class of a noun is reflected in agreement on adnominals and verbs. In what follows, the agreement behaviour with animate referents will be analyzed. Nouns with human referents behave differently in this respect than other animate nouns, and will be discussed first in section 3. The subsequent four sections will concern, respectively, nouns with animal referents in 4, a summary of the AC phenomenon in Ndengeleko in 5, a comparison with other Southern Coastal languages in 6, and finally conclusions in 7.

3. Agreement with human referents

In this section we will have a closer look at the agreement behaviour of nouns with human referents. Apart from classes 1/2, we find such nouns in classes 5/4, 7/8, 9 and 12(/8).

3.1. Nouns in classes 1/2

As in many other Bantu languages, class 1 singular, paired with a class 2 plural, exclusively contains nouns with human referents.

- | | | |
|-----|--|---|
| (3) | <i>nkolongwa</i>
'man, mister' (cl.1) | <i>akolongwa</i>
'men, misters' (cl.2) |
| (4) | <i>nng'eni</i>
'visitor' (cl.1) | <i>ageni</i>
'visitors' (cl.2) |
| (5) | <i>mwana</i>
'child' (cl.1) | <i>bana</i>
'children' (cl.2) |

Nouns in class 1 have a prefix *mu-*. Because of morphophonological changes, this results in a single, assimilated nasal when the noun stem initial consonant is voiceless (3), and in a geminate nasal when the noun stem initial consonant is voiced (4)⁶, see also (Ström 2006). In case of a vowel initial stem, there is glide formation (5). Nouns in class 2 have a prefix *a-* or *ba-*. The nouns with human referents all take concords of classes 1 and 2, as expected:

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|------------|----------------|-------------------|
| (6) | <i>mwana</i> | <i>w-a</i> | <i>nng'eni</i> | <i>a-gons-ike</i> |
| | 1.child | 1CD-of | 1.visitor | 1SM-sleep-PERF |
| | 'The child of the visitor is sleeping (has fallen asleep).' | | | |

3.2. Nouns in class 1a

Some prefixless nouns with human referents, mainly kinship terms, take their agreement in class 1/2. These are mostly not used in the plural, but noun class

⁶ Following Swahili orthographic conventions, which the speakers are used to, *nng'* is phonetically [ŋŋ]. There is no Ndengeleko orthography.

6 plurals are given by some speakers when elicited. Other speakers reject such plurals, and state that these nouns are only ever used in the singular.

- | | | |
|-----|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (7) | (a) <i>mau</i>
‘mother’ (cl.1a) | <i>mamau</i>
‘mothers’ (cl.6) |
| | (b) <i>kulū</i>
‘elder’ (cl.1a) | <i>makulū</i>
‘elders’ (cl.6) |

The singular nouns ‘mother’ and ‘father’, take the concords of noun class 2, which is honorific agreement.

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------------------------|
| (8) | <i>tatɪ</i>
1a.father
‘His/her father.’ | <i>b-aake</i>
2CD-3SPOSS |
|-----|---|-----------------------------|

It is common in Bantu linguistic studies to refer to this kind of nouns as belonging to 1a, as they are similar to class 1 (they denote humans and take agreement of class 1) but they lack a typical class 1 prefix. Often this class includes kinship terms, proper names and personified animals in fables (Maho 1999). If there is a plural in class 6, agreement is with class 2 (for the speakers who accept such plurals).

- | | | |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|
| (9) | <i>matatɪ</i>
6.fathers
‘My fathers.’ | <i>b-aangu</i>
2CD-1 SPOSS |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|

3.3. Human referents in other classes

Apart from derived nouns (see 3.4), nouns referring to humans can be found in class 7 (10) and 9 (11), although these are few. Nouns with human referents in these classes mainly refer to persons with a handicap, or unfavourable characteristics, like *ngangali* ‘stubborn person’ (cl.9). It also includes the nouns *kilumbū* ‘lover’ (in class 7) and *mbwiga* ‘friend’ (in class 9). These all take class 1/2 agreement.

- (10) *kiwete* *nnaasu*
 7.lame person 1NCP.long
 ‘Tall lame person.’
- (11) *mbuguŋu* *a-wii* *par*
 9.deaf person 1SM-fall.PERF down
 ‘The deaf person fell.’

In the data there is just one exception to this agreement pattern. In the following example, *kilumbu* ‘lover’ (cl. 7) unexpectedly takes class 7 agreement on the possessive pronoun. Also the plural in class 8, *ilumbu* ‘lovers’, uses CC, with the possessive pronoun.

- (12) *ywaa* *mundu* *tu-bonagiine* *kilumbu* *s-aake Asa*
 1CD.that 1.person 1PSM-meet.PERF 7.lover 7CD-3SPOSS Aisha
 ‘That person we met is Aisha’s lover.’

Agreement with other determiners are with class 1 for this noun. It is possible that this is due to the influence of Swahili. One of the contexts in which Swahili uses CC instead of AC is when human relationship terms are in attributive possessive constructions, as is the case in the above Ndengeleko example. The data available does not make it possible to conclude whether this is also a rule in Ndengeleko, alternatively an example of code-switching, or even a change in Ndengeleko grammar under Swahili influence. Because the possessive often merges with human relationship terms, as in *mwana-ge* ‘child-his/her’, agreement behaviour cannot always be determined.

Some of these nouns with human referents can be used in the plural. Class 7 nouns take a plural in class 8, and sometimes an alternative plural in 6. Some class 9 nouns, which are singular as well as plural, can take an alternative plural in class 6. For all of these nouns with human referents, AC is compulsory:

- (13) *mabwiga* *b-ene*
 6.friends 2CD-it(self)
 ‘the friends (themselves)’

3.4. Derived nouns

The creative Ndengeleko noun class system allows for noun stems with human referents to be used in class 5 for an augmentative meaning, and class 12 for a diminutive meaning. This is also referred to as ‘secondary classification’ in Bantu noun class studies (Maho 1999: 88). In these cases the agreement is of the inherent class (CC), and forms the only case in which agreement of humans is not with classes 1 and 2. The following is an example with the noun stem *-ana*, as in *mwana* ‘child’ (cl.1), with augmentative meaning in noun class 5; ‘big child’:

- (14) *liana* *lyaake* *li-kulu*
 5.big child 5CD.3SPOSS 5NCP-big
 ‘Her big child.’

When referring to humans, these augmentatives are always derogatory. The augmentatives in class 5 take their plural in class 4, for example *miana* ‘big children’; *linsembe* ‘big boy’, with the plural *minsembe*; *liumba* ‘big fish’, plural *miumba*. This is interesting as otherwise class 4 is never a plural of class 5 in Ndengeleko. It is also not common in a Bantu comparative perspective (Legère 2009: 4). The same noun stem as in (10), *-ana*, can be used in noun class 12 for a diminutive meaning:

- (15) *kana* *k-a* *nng’eni* *ka-ando-lil-a*
 12.small child 12CD-of 1.visitor 12SM-PRES.PROG-cry-FV
 ‘The small child of the visitor is crying.’

A plural of these diminutives is formed in noun class 8 for some nouns. For other nouns no plural form is accepted. Certain speakers also accept diminutives in noun class 7, but this is not common, and can most likely be explained as a result of Swahili influence. There are many ‘small things’ in class 7, but these are inherently in this class and are not moved there for derivative reasons. As we have seen there are some nouns with human referents in 7, but they are not derived, and all take agreement of class 1.

In sum, all nouns with human referents in classes 1/2, in class 1a, and in classes 7/8 and 9 induce class 1/2 agreement. Derived nouns with human referents in classes 5/4 and 12(/8), on the other hand, take the inherent agreement of their class. We will come back to the reason for this when discussing derived nouns with animal referents

4. Agreement with animal referents

Nouns with animal referents differ from nouns with human referents in their agreement behaviour. There are no nouns with animal referents in classes 1/2. Rather, they occur in classes 3/4, 5/6, 7/8, 9, 11, 12 and 14. However, in whichever class these nouns are, they typically make use of Animate Concord. There are some exceptions to this, however.

4.1. Underived nouns

Animate Concord is illustrated in (16) for class 3, with a subject marker of class 1. Class 3 animate nouns take plurals in class 4.

- (16) *nkwanda* *a-~~mb~~-a* *limbwa*
 3.aardvark 1SM-dig-FV 5.hole
 ‘The aardvark digs a hole.’

There are quite a number of animals in class 7 that have a plural in class 8. Animate concord is again the rule, as can be seen with the demonstrative in a noun phrase (17), and a nominal object in class 7 with an object agreement marker of class 1 (1OM) on the verb (18):

- (17) *kikoko* *uyu* *ikoko* *aba*
 7.rat (sp.) 1 CD.this 8.rat 2 CD.this
 ‘This rat.’ ‘These rats.’

- (18) *uyu* *mwana* *a-m-bulage* *kinduli*
 1 CD.this 1.child 1SM-1OM-kill.PERF 7.squirrel
 ‘This child killed the squirrel.’

Class 9 contains more nouns with animal referents than all the other classes taken together. Here AC is also the rule, as we can see with the object marker in (18).

- (19) *u-m-bulige* *ywaa* *ngule*
 2SSM-1OM-kill.PERF 1CD.that 9.rat
 ‘You killed that rat.’

Among languages with AC, AC is favoured when it is not in the same noun phrase as the controlling noun (Wald 1975: 299). Ndengeleko does not make any distinction between the two – AC is used in both cases. In (20) and (21), there is a concordial element before and outside of the NP of the controlling noun, as well as a concordial element inside the NP and after the controlling noun. In both cases, AC is used.

- (20) *aba* *ng'ombe* *b-aangu*
 2 CD.these 9.cows 2CD-1SPOSS
 'These are my cows.'

- (21) *ba-a-bweni* *ng'ombe* *b-iingi*
 2SM-2OM-see.PERF 9.cows 2CD-many
 'They saw a lot of cows.'

The following sentence tests whether the agreement hierarchy (Corbett 2006: 271) plays a role in the choice of AC/CC. In certain languages, the quantifier 'one' takes CC in this sentence while the possessive pronoun takes AC.

- (22) *mbusi* *yu-mo* *a-bi* *kulyu* *w-aangu*
 9.goat 1CD-one 1SM-be.PERF 17CD.there 1CD-1SPOSS
 'The one goat which is yonder is mine.'

From these examples, we might conclude that AC is used throughout for underived animate nouns in Ndengeleko. This does not hold, however, when we look at plurals in class 6. This is the regular plural of class 5, but as we have seen in Table 2, it pairs with almost any class as a regular or alternative plural. Animals in noun class 9 normally do not have a separate plural form. Also for these nouns, plurals in noun class 6 are found in the data. When this is the case, AC is used in some examples and CC in others. In (23), object agreement on the verb is AC, but agreement on the demonstrative is CC:

- (23) *ni-a-bulige* *gaa* *makule*
 1SSM-2OM-kill.PERF 6CD.that 6.rats
 'I have killed those rats.'

It seems that this is an example of agreement within the noun phrase differing from that outside the NP. But in (24), subject agreement on the verb is CC.

- (24) *makule* *ga-butuki* *pa-kinza*
 6.rats 6SM-run.PERF 16LOC-kitchen
 'The rats ran into the kitchen.'

When trying to find out which rules exactly are at play in this variation, I found that CC and AC are actually in free variation (24)–(25).

- (30) *ngamba* *akulu akulu*
 9.prawns 2NCP.big 2NCP.big
 ‘Big prawns.’

This points to a conclusion that agreement depends on which class is used, rather than semantic distinctions as small/big and food/non-food. We will come back to this in 4.2. Class 14 can take CC or AC, but noun class 9 always induces AC. Class 6 can also take CC or AC. As evidenced by the following example, CC is not used because the noun refers to food:

- (31) *makenya* *ga-ando-yuguy-a*
 6.sand fleas 6SM-PRES.PROG-itch-FV
 ‘The sand fleas are itching.’

4.2. Derived nouns

As we saw in 3.4, derived nouns with human referents induce CC. This is the same with animal referents. The regular class for diminutives is 12; all nouns in this class have a derived form meaning ‘small’. The noun for ‘hare’ in Ndengeleko is *mbesa* (cl.9), ‘small hare’ is *kapesa*:⁷

- (32) *kapesa* *k-ene* *ka-tolwiike*
 12.small hare 12CD-itself 12SM-run away.PERF
 ‘The little hare (himself) has run away.’

Diminutives are occasionally also formed in class 7, which is likely to be due to Swahili influence. They use CC:

- (33) *kipusi* *isi* *ki-nogike*
 7.small goat 7CD.this 7SM-be beautiful-PERF
 ‘This small goat is beautiful.’

This is the same agreement behaviour which we saw with human referent nouns. In fact, the language behaves exactly as we might expect from knowledge of how Bantu noun class systems work. A derived noun like *kipusi* ‘little goat’, the diminutive of *mbusi* ‘goat’ (cl.9), takes agreement of the class it has been derived from, 7 in this case. In these cases there is a strong

⁷ The noun stem is *-pesa*. Preceded by the homorganic nasal prefix of noun class 9 (N-), the voiceless consonant becomes voiced. This is a regular process in Ndengeleko.

semantic motivation for noun class assignment to 7 or 12: to show the littleness of something. This is the case even if the diminutive meaning of class 7 is borrowed from Swahili. The agreement therefore ‘stays’ with the noun class, even though the referent is animate. Other nouns in class 7 which we have seen like *kindvuti* (18) and *kikoko* (17) are inherent nouns of noun class 7. They have not been moved to class 7 for semantic reasons, and are not necessarily small, as evidenced by the noun for ‘very large crocodile’ *kipumbugu*, which is also in noun class 7. Therefore, with underived nouns, the semantic content of the *noun itself* (not the possible diminutive meaning of the class) is the basis for agreement, and because they are animates, they take the agreement of noun classes 1 and 2. The same processes have been shown for Swahili (Wald 1975: 273).

This difference between derived and underived nouns leads to an analysis of the animate nouns in class 6 as being derived: noun class 6 is a plural class which is used as a ‘default’ plural when there is no other plural. In Table 2, we saw how this class can be used as a plural of almost any singular class. Similar developments of class 6 are seen in other Bantu languages. Also with this class, there is a strong semantic motivation for its use: showing the ‘pluralness’ of something. It has been suggested (Maho 1999: 144) that the inherent gender of any noun is its singular class belonging, and ‘that pluralisation in Bantu languages may have to be treated on a par with secondary classification, that is, as a derivational phenomenon’. The Ndengeleko data, I believe, further justify this point. It is understandable that this plural is used especially with nouns of class 9, as there is no difference between the singular and the plural with these nouns. This causes ambiguity which the speaker wants to solve in some way, and therefore turns to 6 to form a more distinct plural. A speaker indicated to me, in the case of *ngule* ‘rat’ (cl.9), that using class 6 *makule* ‘rats’ is like ‘expressing plural twice’, as the word *ngule* is already plural (as well as singular).

In addition, class 14 is partly used for derivative purposes; it is possible to move a noun to 14 to derive an abstract or mass meaning. The speaker who gives the example in (29) therefore hesitates in the judgement of which agreement should be used.

5. Summary

The Ndengeleko noun class and agreement system is governed by grammatical as well as semantic considerations. Judging from other Bantu languages, and the supposed Proto-Bantu system, this is a semantically motivated syntactic innovation. This means, the role of animacy is increasing and comes to overrule grammatical agreement. Different factors are at play in this system.

(a) Nouns which are derived to a class for diminutive/augmentative reasons (humans as well as animals) are excluded from AC. This is because the semantic content of the class to which they are derived is more important than the animacy distinction. The diminutiveness or augmentativeness is expressed through prefixes as well as through the agreement system; the prefix alone is not enough. The present study suggests that class 6 is also used for the explicit derivation of plurality in Ndengeleko, and that CC is therefore used. The alternation between CC and AC is explained by the fact that class 6 (in the case of CC) as well as class 2 (in the case of AC) are plural. By using agreement of class 2, the semantic content of the noun does not become less plural. Using the agreement of 1 with class 5 augmentatives, for example, would decrease the augmentative meaning. The semantic content of the Ndengeleko noun class system is not only expressed by the noun itself, but also by the agreement system.

(b) When variation between AC and CC is an option, there is an animacy hierarchy: nouns with human referents take AC to a greater extent than nouns with animal referents. For human nouns there are no other exceptions than the derived nouns with augmentative or diminutive meanings.

(c) The variation mentioned in (a) is free, depending on speaker and/or occasion. CC is thereby judged to be more like 'proper' Ndengeleko.

6. Other southern coastal languages

How does the distinction between AC and CC in Ndengeleko compare to the agreement pattern in surrounding languages? As already mentioned, the study by Wald (1975) did not include southern Tanzanian languages. This section includes a comparison with a selection of other languages in the group of languages called 'P' in the classification by Guthrie (1967/71). In this classification, Ndengeleko is in subgroup P10.

In the same subgroup, and closely related, is the Matuumbi language. Odden (1996: 30–32) describes a situation similar to the one in Ndengeleko, but with some important differences. Nouns with human referents all induce AC. The exception to this is, as in Ndengeleko, the derived nouns in 5/6 and 12/13.⁸ Class 5 is augmentative and derogatory. Any noun referring to a human can also use CC of its class as a form of insult, implying that the person is not really human. If they were human, then the noun would have to take agreement of 1/2. For nouns with animal referents we find some

⁸ There is, however, no trace of a plural class 13 in Ndengeleko.

differences between the two languages. Singular nouns use AC, except in class 5 (these are not derived, and seem to be very few). Plural nouns, on the other hand, use CC. This is the case for classes 6, 8 and 9. The author does not make any mention of animals in any other plural classes. The ambiguity in number of class 9 is thus solved in Matuumbi by using different forms of agreement for the two: 1 for singular and 9 for plural animate nouns. If we assume that Bantu languages affected by the animacy distinction are moving on a continuum, from CC being the more traditional situation to AC as a more recent innovation, then Matuumbi is apparently more conservative than Ndengeleko.

The Mwera language is a member of the P20 subgroup. Harries (1950) does not explicitly discuss animacy and agreement in this language, although information on the topic can occasionally be found in the grammar. Prefixless nouns with animal referents are grouped in class 1a (with a plural prefix *aca-* or *aci-*), and use agreement of class 1, and thus can be assumed to have undergone noun class shift. Furthermore, animals can be found in class 5/6 and 9. Here, it is noted that there is variation in the use of AC/CC (Harries 1950: 27, 30). Class 5 can also be augmentative but the author makes no mention of the agreement involved, so it can be assumed to use CC. So does class 12, which is diminutive. Animals can also be found in class 7/8 and 11, and the examples show the use of CC in these cases.

Moving south, to languages in southern coastal Tanzania and in northern Mozambique, we can observe that AC is used in the singular with animal referents. In the plural, the noun has shifted class and now takes the noun class prefix of class 2. This is, for example, the case in Makonde (Mawia dialect in northern Mozambique) (Wald 1975: 277). This is analyzed by Wald as avoidance of violating the class concord. The language ‘prefers’ to shift the noun, rather than to use conflicting AC with a noun of another class than 2. Why have these languages only moved class 2, and not the singular? This is possibly because many animals, especially herd-animals, are more likely to be referred to in the plural, and to avoid the conflict is more important in frequently used constructions. This could also be the reason that CC is more frequently retained with plural nouns in Matuumbi.

In the Chinnima dialect of Makonde (P23) of southern Tanzania, animals in classes other than 1/2 demand agreement of their class (Kraal 2005: 92), that is CC. Plural nouns with human referents in classes other than 2 mostly take inherent agreement, but take class 2 agreement with adjectives and numerals. Singular nouns with human referents in classes other than 1 also mostly take inherent agreement. Agreement appears to vary from noun to noun according to Kraal (2005: 93). The word for infant, *luúnga*, for example, takes agreement of class 1 with subject concord, numerals and some other specifiers, but class 11 (the inherent class) in all other cases. This language

has not moved as far as Ndengeleko on the ‘CC/AC continuum’, but is marginally affected. We see here the importance of the animacy hierarchy. Nouns with human referents are starting to become affected, while nouns with animal referents are not.

Even further to the south, Makuwa-Enahara (P31) is a language which has undergone noun class shift to avoid AC. Nouns with human referents are in classes 1/2. Some nouns in class 1a (mostly loans) denoting professions take their plurals in class 6. Also here, we see CC; AC is not accepted.

- (34) *mw-íncerer-é* *mapátárerero* *ma-kináku*
 2pl-add-OPT 6.builders 6-other
 ‘You should get more builders.’ (Wal 2010, pc)

Nouns with animal referents are in 1a/2a, and are prefixless or have a specific added prefix for these classes (Wal 2009: 40). Agreement is the same as that of 1/2.

- (35) *nakhúku* *ánákhúku*
 ‘crow’ (cl.1a) ‘crows’ (cl.2a)
 (Wal 2009: 43)

There are also nouns with animal referents in 9/10 and 4; they take CC.

- (36) *epúri* *e-kiná* *e-rí* *váyí?*
 9.goat 9.other 9-be where
 ‘Where is the other goat?’ (Wal 2009: 41)

The use of animate concord, therefore, appears along the whole coast of Tanzania, until somewhere around the Tanzania-Mozambique border. Table 3 gives an overview of the languages in the P-group discussed here. As a comparison, a NECB language like Bondei exhibits obligatory AC in all environments (Wald 1975: 297).

Table 3: Comparison of AC/CC in southern coastal languages

<i>Language</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Human ref.</i>	<i>Exceptions</i>	<i>Animal ref.</i>	<i>Exceptions</i>
Ndengeleko	P11	AC	Derived aug/dim.	AC	Alternation in cl.6 and 14
Matuumbi	P13	AC	Derived aug/dim; insults.	AC	Plural in cl.9, cl.6 and cl.8: CC. S cl.5: CC. S cl.7: alternation.
Mwera	P22	AC	—	CC	Cl. 5/6 and 9 show variation AC/CC
Makonde (Mawia)	P23	CC	—	Singular: AC. Plural all shifted to cl.2	—
Makonde (Chinnima)	P23	CC	Alternation AC/CC, esp. in pl.	CC	—
Makhuwa-Enahara	P31	CC	—	CC, noun class shift	—

Further investigation into this phenomenon would be needed to determine its distribution, as not all languages are included here and not all grammars include enough relevant data. To the south of this area and also elsewhere in the Bantu speaking area, nouns denoting animals are categorised in noun class 1 or 1a (Maho 1999: 125–126), as we have also seen for Makhuwa-Enahara. The increasing use of AC, although it is applied differently in these coastal Tanzanian languages, is possibly taking place under the influence of Swahili. The Swahili communities along the coast of east Africa, as well as the strong position of Swahili as a second language, is a strong indication for this.

7. Conclusion

For the Northeast Coastal Bantu languages (NECB) it has been shown that the use of AC is widespread, but that it applies differently to the aforementioned languages. In the same study, the phenomenon was shown to be insignificant in the interiors of Kenya and Tanzania, including the south of Tanzania (Wald 1975: 294). The use of AC varies with the distance from the coast. Also the

Bantu languages on the south-eastern coast of Tanzania are clearly affected by the animate/inanimate distinction. Agreement of classes 1/2 is strongly connected with animacy in Bantu in general, and animate nouns in other classes are in one way or another ‘directed’ towards these classes. This occurs either by using agreement of these classes, as in Ndengeleko and other Tanzanian coastal languages, or by moving animate nouns to these classes, as in Makuwa-Enahara. Agreement is a strong indicator of meaning in these languages, possibly equal to the meaning coded in the class/prefix. We see this in Matuumbi, for example. Not using agreement of class 1 and 2 for humans is possible, but the speaker thereby implies that the referent is not truly human: a strong insult.

The move towards AC, alternatively towards classes 1/2, is affecting the noun class systems of many Bantu languages. This phenomenon is probably more widespread than we know of from available grammars, as it is not always discussed by writers. In addition, AC is considered less grammatical than CC in some cases in Ndengeleko.

In Ndengeleko, the interaction between AC and CC is related to the system of derivation which is present in the noun class system. Nouns which have been moved to another class keep the agreement of that class to a greater extent than other nouns. This has led to the conclusion in this paper that class 6 can be used to derive plurality in Ndengeleko, more or less as a secondary classification. In Table 2, we saw that class 6 can be used as the plural of virtually any singular noun, for some speakers. It makes the plural more transparent, especially for prefixless nouns. Some languages in the northernmost Bantu area have noun class systems based solely on the features ‘animacy’ and ‘number’ (Maho 1999: 123). One might want to conclude that languages like Ndengeleko, which make use of animacy and which ‘overuse’ certain plurals, are moving in the same direction. At present, however, such a simplification is a remote possibility. Changes in the animacy/inanimacy distinction and the singular/plural pairings have the effect of expanding the system. Agreement in GAC languages has come to be conditioned by the meaning, rather than the formal class, of the controlling noun. This is particularly clear in the case of animate nouns. There are other instances in Ndengeleko in which the speaker uses the agreement system to convey a specific meaning. For example, a mass noun or other noun without a singular/plural distinction can take agreement of noun class 5 or 11 with the numeral ‘one’ to show singularity.

- (37) *ni-pala* *uliya* *ulufi* *li-mo*
 1SSM-want to eat 14.shrimp 5CD-one
 ‘I will eat one shrimp.’

- (38) *mwa* *lu-mo*
 3.leaf 11CD-one
 ‘one leaf’

Study of the interaction between noun class and agreement, and the changes which are taking place in languages like Ndengeleko, can give us important insights into how these complex gender systems work. Hereby, this paper shows the importance of describing and documenting languages as they are spoken in everyday life, without being prescriptive.

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