Nominal Classification in Bantu or the Semantax of the Noun

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The workshop aims to address the issue of nominal classification in Bantu following the typology of binary features [±Predicative] and [±Argumental] proposed by Alexiadou et al. (2007: 192), as summarized in Table 1.

Feature specification	Denotation	Language
[−arg], [+pred]	Predicates	Romance languages
[+arg], [+pred]	Arguments or predicates	Germanic languages
[+arg], [−pred]	Kinds	Chinese, Japanese

Table 1: Typology of nominal classification according to Alexiadou et al. (2007: 192)

One possible observation that results from the analysis of this table is the absence of Bantu languages in this linguistic mapping according to the features [±Predicative] and [±Argumental]. This observation also holds for analyses in the earlier works of Chierchia (1998a, 1998b); Carlson (1980); Carlson and Pelletier (1995); Carlson and Spejewski (1997), One could infer that absence of Bantu languages in these works is due to lack of descriptions available. In this perspective, we would like to take advantage of this scientific meeting to stimulate work on the grammatical category of the noun in Bantu according to the features [±Predicative] and [±Argumental].

In Swahili (G42), Zulu (S42) and Embosi (C25), nouns in the singular or plural can appear in subject and object position. Also, there is no syntactic distinction between definite and indefinite, specific and generic because of the absence of determiners (article) as shown in examples (1)–(3).

(1) Swahili (G42) (Vitale 1981: 12)
    ki-ti   ki-me-vunj-ik-a
    7-chair   7-PRF-break-NEUT-FV
    'The/a chair is broken.'

(2) Embosi (C25) (Ndongo-Ibara 2000)
    ngá   i-té   ba-na   o   le-kɔ́li
    1SG   1SG-see.PST   2-child   to   5-school
    'I saw (the) children at school.'

(3) Zulu (S42) (Stuart 1940: 30)
    a-ba-ntu   a   ba-hambi-le
    AUG-2-person   2.REL   3PL-go-PST
    '(The) people who went'

Such is not the case in certain African languages as is case of Wolof in (4).

(4) Wolof (Atlantic) (Diouf 2009: 101)
    a. ab   téere   b. ay   téere   c. téere bi   d. téere yi
       INDEF.SG book   INDEF.PL book   book DEF.SG   book   DEF.PL
       'a book'   'books'   'the book'   'the books'

Each of the examples (1)–(3) shows that Bantu languages, at least those mentioned above, are close to [+arg], [‑pred] like Chinese, with the difference that in Chinese all

nouns are mass nouns justifying the presence of classifiers. These languages can be [+arg], [+pred] like English, but in English, singular nouns without determination are not tolerated. Bantu languages can be [-arg], [+pred] like Italian or Greek, but in these two languages, plural nouns without determination are only attested in object position. The nominal mapping parameter or the classification of nouns raises the question of the semantic interpretation of the noun. Indeed, the noun phrase in the singular, for example, does not have the same semantic requirements in French, Italian, Chinese, English or Bantu languages in the subject and complement position. In the same way, the presence or absence of a determiner with the noun is not symmetrical in these different languages.

The questions raised in this workshop are:
(i) What is the configuration of the Bantu noun phrase according to the features [±Predicative] and [±Argumental]?
(ii) What are the semantic criteria to distinguish between generic/ specific/determined nouns, mass nouns, or quantifiable nouns in Bantu languages?
(iii) How do Bantu nouns behave in relation to the syntax-semantics interface (topicalization, focalization, inverted subject constructions) and morphosyntax (augment, diminutive, pre-prefix)?

We particularly welcome communication proposals on:
AXIS 1: Nominal classification in Bantu
AXIS 2: Generic/specific/determined nouns in Bantu
AXIS 3: Noun Phrase in Bantu

Communications on the noun phrase should take into account the conclusions of the categorization of the noun according to the binary traits as proposed by Chierchia (1998a, 1998b) and Carlson and Spejewski (1997).

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