

Object marking in Bantu: reassessing agreement

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The question of the status of object markers in specific Bantu languages and across the language family has been the subject of debate since the 1980s (Bresnan and Mchombo 1987). This topic, alongside with Bantu morphosyntax more generally, has received renewed attention in the last decade (such as Baker 2018; Diercks et al. forthcoming; van der Wal forthcoming; Zeller 2012; Zeller 2014). In addition, the theoretical debates related to Agree, such as whether there Agree has a universal directionality and if so whether it is ‘up’ or ‘down’ have impacted the state of knowledge, as well as developments in the descriptive and theoretical literature on potentially related morphosyntactic properties call for re-examinations of this issue.

Riedel (2009) proposed a unified analysis of Bantu languages as having agreement but not pronominal object marking, contra Bresnan and Mchombo (1987) and Baker (2008), but more data has become available in the ten years since. Particularly relevant are the detailed studies of languages like Zulu (Zeller 2012) and Bukusu (Diercks 2011; Diercks et al. forthcoming) and new comparative work (such as van der Wal forthcoming; Zeller 2014). Other relevant aspects include work on the augment, animacy, asymmetry and new work on specific types of verbs, and the conjoint/disjoint distinction. In this presentation, I attempt to offer a synthesis of this work and its implications on the analysis of object marking in Bantu.