Aspects of subject conjunction in Zulu[1]

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Bantu languages have a number of grammatical genders which are paired into singular/plural classes. The purpose of this article is to find solutions for some of the agreement problems arising from the conjunction of two or more nouns. The research was carried out against the background of the gender conflict resolution rules as proposed by various Bantu linguists. It was found that concord selection is influenced by the semantic content of the conjoined nouns as well as by discourse notions such as presupposition. Accordingly discourse context plays an indispensable role in the interpretation of linguistic data in this study.

Bantoetale het 'n aantal grammatiese klasse wat in enkelvoud/meervoudklasse verdeel is. Die doel van hierdie artikel is om oplossings te vind vir sommige van die kongruensieprobleme wat ontstaan uit die samevoeging van twee of meer naamwoorde. Die navorsing is gedoen teen die agtergrond van die reëls wat verskeie Bantoetaalkundiges vir die oplossing van klassebotsing voorgestel het. Daar is vasgestel dat die seleksie van skakels deur die semantiese inhoud van die saamgevoegde naamwoorde sowel as deur diskoersfaktore soos vooronderstelling beïnvloed word. Derhalwe speel diskoerskonteks 'n onontbeerlike rol in die interpretasie van die feitemateriaal in hierdie studie.

As a result of the noun class system in Zulu, consisting of grammatical genders which are paired into singular/plural classes, a concord problem arises when a sentence contains two or more subjects of different classes. In such a case a suitable subject agreement morpheme has to be chosen to resolve the concord problem. Concordial agreement problems may also arise in cases where subject nouns of the same class are conjoined, as will be illustrated further on.

The main purpose of this article is to provide solutions for some of the agreement problems arising from the conjunction of two or more subjects. This will be done by briefly reviewing existing rules governing agreement of conjoined subjects, whereafter the shortcomings of these rules will be pointed out and finally suggestions will be made to rectify such shortcomings.

Existing rules governing agreement of conjoined subjects

The approach of various Bantu linguists, such as Doke (1955,1973), Van Eeden (1956), Givon (1970), Roberts & Wolontis (1974), and Goslin (1979), to the problems arising from subject conjunction may be summarized as follows:

Rule 1

The concord of class 1/2 plural is used for subject nouns which are [+human], irrespective of the individual classes to which such nouns belong, for example

(1) *Isalukazi nexhegu nomfana bayagoduka*
    7   5   1   2
    'The old woman, the old man, and the boy are going home'

Rule 2

The agreement morpheme of class 9/10 plural determines agreement when the nouns in the conjunction have the semantic feature [+animal] in common, for example

(2) *Ithole   nezingulube   nemvu ziphuza   amanzi*
    5   10   9   10
    'The calf, the pigs, and the sheep are drinking water'

Rule 3

The indefinite concord *ku-* may also be used to resolve agreement problems, but most linguists place a semantic restriction on the use of *ku-* as a means of gender resolution by stating that *ku-* may only be employed if the nouns in the conjunction have the feature [−human] in common, for example

(3) *Imikhonto namawisa kuphandle*
    4   6
    'The spears and the knobkerries are outside'

Rule 4

Plural nouns of the same class forming a compound subject, may use the agreement morpheme of the class concerned if the nouns have either [+human] or [−human] features in common, for example

(4a) *Amabhulukwe namayembe agezwa*
     6   6   6
     'The trousers and shirts were washed'
(4b) *Amakhehla namabutho azobuya*
     6   6   6
     'The old men and the soldiers will return'

Rule 5

The problem of conjunction and concord may be resolved by employing the concord of the noun nearest to the verb. Goslin (1979:25) states that this type of agreement is only acceptable if the noun nearest to the verb includes

the foregoing nouns semantically, for example

(5) *(?)Umkhwekazi wendodana yenkosi kanye nazo*
    1

    zonke izigebengu zazikhona
        8   8
    'The mother-in-law of the prince and the (other)
    robbers were present'

Rule 6

The first noun of the conjunction usually determines
agreement when the conjunction consists of a [+human]
noun followed by a [−human] noun, for example

(6) *Indoda nezinja zayo yazingela*
     9   10   9
    'The man and his dogs hunted'

Rule 7

One subject noun may be employed pre-verbally and the
others post-verbally with the conjunction *na-*, for exam-
ple

(7) *Indoda izingela nenja yayo*
     9   9   9
    'The man hunts with his dog'

Rule 8

The predicate may be repeated, with each subject noun
agreeing individually with the predicate, for example

(8) *Umhambi uyagula nesigijimi siyagula*
     1   1   7   7
    'The traveller and the messenger are ill'

Rule 9

Subject nouns belonging to the same class are conjoined
by using the plural concord of the class concerned, for
example

(9) *(?)Ipuleti nebhodwe angcolile*
     5   5   5
    'The plate and the pot are dirty'

These solutions for agreement problems arising from the
conjunction of subjects nouns are not all satisfactory and
a number of problems remain to be solved.

Indefinite concord *ku-*

It was mentioned in Rule 3 that linguists place a semantic
restriction on the use of *ku-* as solution to the problem of
subject conjunction, namely that *ku-* may only be used
with nouns which have the feature [−human] in com-
mon. Although Zulu speakers accept this restriction re-
garding the use of *ku-*, examples where *ku-* was indeed
used with [+human] nouns, were found. In the following
example the use of the indefinite *ku-* with [+human]
conjoined nouns in a denominal copula construction is il-
lustrated:[2]

(10) *UMnyamane noHamu kwakungamadoda aqavule*
     1   1

     embusweni kaCetshwayo
     'Mnyamane and Hamu were prominent men in
     Cetshwayo's kingdom'

Mother-tongue speakers were positive about there be-
ing no semantic difference between the use of the indef-
inite concord and the class 1/2 plural concord in this ex-
ample. It has been ascertained that the employment of
ku- as agreement morpheme with copula predicates in
the compound past tense is common practice.

Therefore Rule 3 should make provision for the use of
ku- as subject concord in denominal copula construc-
tions involving either [+human] or [−human] conjoined
nouns in the compound past tense.

Agreement with the subject noun nearest to the pre-dicate

According to Rule 5, the concord of the noun nearest to
the predicate may be used to resolve gender conflict pro-
vided that such a noun includes the foregoing nouns of
the conjunction semantically. The example that Goslin
(1979:25) gives in this regard is (5), here repeated as
(11):

(11) *(?)Umkhwekazi wendodana yenkosi kanye nazo*
     1

     zonke izigebengu zazikhona
        8   8
    'The mother-in-law of the prince and the (other)
    robbers were present'

In this example, however, the noun nearest to the
predicate, namely *izigebengu* 'robbers', does not include
the first noun of the conjunction, *umkhwekazi* 'mother-
in-law', semantically since there is no semantic connec-
tion between these two nouns, at least not in this extra-
contextual sentence.

Although this is a rare construction, the resolution of
gender conflict by means of agreement of the noun near-
est to the predicate is illustrated in the following context:

(12) *Yiso leso sikhathi uShaka athuma ngaso induna*
                                              9
     namabutho angamashumi ayisihlanu ukuba
     6
     ayofuna uMhlophekazi.... Kwathi ngemuva kwa-
     6
     *malanga, kwafika umbiko eNkosini ukuthi, lelo-
     dlanzana elingamashumi amahlanu linyamalele,
     alibuyanga ....*
                                              (Ntuli,1971:153)
    'It was at that time that Shaka sent a headman
    and/with 50 warriors to search for Mhlophekazi ....
    After some days, a message arrived at the king's
    place, that that little group of 50 had disappeared,
    it had not returned ...'

At this stage it would probably be beneficial to resort

to a discourse factor such as presupposition. From the context it becomes clear that *amabutho* 'warriors' is the head noun of the conjunction since no mention is made again of *induna* 'headman', whereas the warriors are referred to again further on as *lelodlanzana elingamashumi amahlanu* 'that little group of 50'. *Induna* 'headman' is therefore subordinate in importance and may be termed the subsidiary noun of the conjunction.

Furthermore we know from extra-linguistic knowledge that *induna* 'headman' may be considered to be part of *amabutho* 'warriors' but not vice versa.

The fact that the subject concord of *amabutho* is used and not the [+human] subject concord *ba-*, is probably an indication that *amabutho* is the most important section of the search party.

It is interesting to note that although *amabutho* 'warriors' is presupposed to be the head noun in the conjunction, it is not the initial noun in the conjunction. This may probably be ascribed to the fact that in cultural terms *induna* 'headman' is higher in the hierarchy than *amabutho* 'warriors'.

In conclusion one could note that presupposition as a discourse factor should definitely be taken into consideration in gender conflict resolution. If one subject noun in a conjunction can be labelled as the head noun of the conjunction, such a noun dominates agreement.

Agreement with the initial noun of the conjunction

Nyembezi's (1970:2) point of view that conjunction problems may be resolved by using the concord of the first noun of a conjunction is supported by Goslin (1979:26) and Doke (1955:18), who add that the first noun in the conjunction usually determines agreement when the conjunction consists of a [+human] noun followed by a [−human] noun, as illustrated in (6).

Several examples illustrating this kind of construction were found in literature, but it became apparent that the second noun, be it [+human] or [−human], is usually the **possession** of the first. Consider the following example:

(13) *Laphela-ke idili nomgidi walo omuhle*
     5   5 3
     abantu bachitheka   (Gumbi,1972:54)
     'The feast and its pleasant ceremony ended and the people dispersed'

This example illustrates that even if the first noun shows agreement, it need not necessarily be [+human] as stated in Rule 6. *Idili* 'feast' is semantically superior in this conjunction, since it is planned for a specific purpose and is mentioned earlier in the discourse already. *Umgidi* 'ceremony' only forms part of the feast and would probably not have taken place outside the framework of the feast in this particular context.

In example (14) the possessive concord is not used to indicate possession:

(14) *Wathi lapho esengaphesheya umfana nezinkomo*
                 1   1   10

amanzi abuye ahlangana   (Nyembezi,1977:16)
'When the boy and the cattle were on the other side, the water closed up again'

It is, however, presupposed by the author that the reader is aware of the possessive relationship between the head noun *umfana* 'boy' and the second noun *izinkomo* 'cattle'. This relationship is confirmed elsewhere in the context where the possessive concord is used, i.e. *izinkomo zakhe* 'his cattle'.

It becomes clear from (13) & (14) that the first noun in such conjunctions is the possessor, making it the head noun, while the second noun, which is usually the possession of the first, is semantically subordinate to the head noun.

Furthermore it is confirmed by mother-tongue speakers that this type of construction is also possible even if the second noun of the conjunction has [+human] features, for example:

(15) **Umfazi nengane yakhe ufikile**
     1   9   1
     'The woman, with her child, has arrived'

This sentence implies, however, that the woman and child have arrived together, the woman possibly even carrying the child.

Moreover, it is important to note that predicates place selectional restrictions on the choice of subject concords. In other words, it is not every predicate that could agree with only one of the conjoined nouns. The following examples, for instance, are doubtful sentences since it is felt that *ingane* 'child' is excluded in the predicate:

(16a) *(?)Umfazi nengane yakhe uyagula*
       1   9   1
     'The woman with her child is ill'
(16b) *(?)Umfazi nengane yakhe muhle*
       1   9   1
     'The woman with her child is pretty'

An amendment could therefore be made to Rule 6, namely that the first noun of a conjunction, being the head noun of such a conjunction, could determine agreement provided that the succeeding noun be the subsidiary noun and provided that the predicate place no selection restriction on the choice of a particular subject concord.

Equi-gender subject nouns

A problem arises from Rule 9, involving the use of the plural concord of the class concerned if two conjoined nouns belong to the same gender. Conjunction reduction does not seem to be associated with number resolution in cases of [−human] conjoined singular nouns belonging to the same class. In other words, two [−human] conjoined nouns both belonging to class 5/6 singular for instance, do not take a class 5/6 plural subject concord as might be expected. For example, (17) is considered to be ungrammatical by mother-tongue speakers:

(17) *Ipuleti nebhodwe angcolile
      5   5   6
      'The plate and the pot are dirty'

The reason for the ungrammaticality of (17) is probably the fact that these nouns do not, either separately or conjoined, involve semantic plurality, i.e. we do not have more than one plate, nor do we have more than one pot.

Since both subject nouns in (17) have the feature [−human] in common, agreement takes place with the indefinite class *uku-*, according to Zulu speakers. Consider the following example as grammatical alternative of (17):

(18) Ipuleti nebhodwe kungcolile
      5   5
      'The plate and the pot are dirty'

The use of the class 5/6 singular subject concord in (18) would also be unacceptable as it would result in the exclusion of one of the subjects in the predicate.

Rule 9 does not apply to singular subject nouns with the feature [+human] either, since mother-tongue speakers reject the following example which involves two [+human] class 7/8 singular subject nouns taking the class 7/8 plural concord:

(19) *Isangoma nesanusi ziyagoduka
      7   7   8
      'The witchdoctor and the diviner are going home'

Here too, the individual subjects, either separate or conjoined, are not plural and therefore *zi-* is not acceptable as it does not include both features [+human] and [+plural]. In such cases Rule 1 comes into operation, i.e. the concord of class 1/2 plural is employed:

(20) Isangoma nesanusi bayagoduka
      7   7   2
      'The witchdoctor and the diviner are going home'

It seems thus, that conjunction reduction is not always associated with number resolution. Rule 9 does apply, however, to conjoined nouns in class 1 and in class 9, where conjunction reduction to class 2 and class 10 takes place respectively.

So far one can conclude that conjoined [−human] equi-gender singular subjects use *ku-* as subject concord, although nouns with the feature [+animal] also employ the class 10 concord. On the other hand, conjoined [+human] equi-gender subject nouns, including nouns in class 1, use *ba-* as subject concord.

This brings us to a further aspect of the problem, namely cases involving subject nouns which not only belong to the same class, but which are basically identical in form and meaning. In such cases Rule 9 seems to apply again, according to Zulu speakers, for example

(21a) Iphepha lesiXhosa nephepha lesiZulu awafani
       5   5   6

'The Xhosa paper and the Zulu paper are not the same'

(21b) Lommese nalowommese isetshenziswa
       3   3   4
       ukuhluba amakhasi
       'This knife and that knife are used to peel fruit'

(21) reveals that if the head nouns are the same, the plural concord of the class concerned is used, since the plural concord contains an aspect of plurality.

Summing up, it seems that subject nouns which belong to the same class and are conjoined can be divided into three semantic categories, namely [+human], [+animal], and [+inanimate].

[+human] equi-gender subjects **always** agree grammatically with class 1/2 plural.

[+animal] equi-gender subjects either show agreement with the 'animal class' 9/10 plural or with the indefinite class *uku-*.

[+inanimate] equi-gender subjects of all classes agree grammatically with class *uku-*. [+animal] and [+inanimate] equi-gender subjects which are basically identical in form and meaning reduce conjunction to the plural concord of the class concerned, the concord of which reflects the plurality of such nouns.

Avoidance of agreement problems in conjunction

In Zulu literature the agreement problem, especially as far as the conjunction of [+human] and [−human] nouns is concerned, is mostly avoided by means of either comitative constructions as illustrated in (22):

(22) Nampa abafana sebefikile nembuzi ezohlatshwa
        2   2   9
      'Here are the boys, they have arrived with the
      slaughter goat'   (Gumbi,1972:46)

or by means of repetition of the predicate:

(23) Amazimu athe efika ekhaya afica inyama
                                       9
      ingasekho nezinkomo zingasekho nomfana
      9   10   10   1
      engasekho
      1   (Nyembezi,1977:16)
      'When the cannibals arrived at home, they found
      the meat, the cattle, and the boy missing'

The reason for the avoidance of conjunction of [+human] and [−human] nouns is most probably due to the 'animacy' hierarchy which exists in many Bantu languages. Hawkinson & Hyman (1974:150) point out that the 'animacy' hierarchy in order of importance is (a) human, (b) animal, and (c) inanimate, in Shona. The same hierarchy seems to exist in Zulu since [+human] nouns are seldom found in conjunctions with [−human] nouns even if the nouns concerned are on the same level semantically. Givon reports that Luganda 'somehow "resists" the conjunction of human

with non-human nouns. Rather, the comitative transformational channel is preferred.'
(1970:253)
Zulu speakers who were consulted, instinctively changed sentences containing a [+human] and [−human] conjunction to a comitative construction, for example

(24a) *Indoda nezinkabi ?buya ensimini* →
       9   10
       'The man and the oxen returned from the field'
(24b) *Indoda yabuya ensimini nezinkabi*
       9   9   10
       'The man returned from the field with the oxen'

It was stated earlier in Rule 7 that Voeltz (1971:43) considers the comitative construction to be the only manner of resolving gender conflict even in the case of [+human] subjects, but it should be pointed out here that although Zulu speakers find the comitative construction the most natural and convenient means of treating gender differences, it seems that presupposition plays a role in comitative constructions, i.e. it is presupposed that the [+human] noun, which determines agreement, carries out the action 'together with' the associate noun. If these two nouns had been on equal semantic footing, the predicate would probably have been repeated instead, to avoid gender conflict.

Summary

In this article agreement problems regarding conjoined subjects in Zulu were reviewed. Whereas some problems have already been dealt with either satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily by Bantu linguists, others have been overlooked so far. An attempt was made to solve such problems in terms of semantics and discourse factors with the aid of Zulu texts.

The findings concerning research done with regard to the resolution of agreement problems encountered with conjoined subjects may be summarized as in Table 1.

Finally it should be noted that all the possible conjunctions in the table may also be avoided by means of comitative constructions or repetition of the verb. Furthermore it must be kept in mind that this scheme for the resolution of agreement problems in conjunction is not irrefutable. It should be regarded as a guide-line according to which gender differences may be resolved in a natural and acceptable manner.

Notes

1. In this article some of the most important findings which were arrived at in a masters dissertation entitled *Subject and object agreement in Zulu* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, completed in 1985) are summarized. Financial aid by the HSRC for the purpose of this research is gratefully acknowledged.
2. See Bosch (1986:59).
3. In the case of [+human] conjoined nouns.
4. In the case of [+animal] conjoined nouns.
5. Except if a [+human] noun is included in the conjunction.

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Table 1 Guidelines for concord selection

Head noun Singular/Plural	+	Subordinate noun Singular/Plural	=	Concord of head noun
Head noun Plural	+	**Head noun** Plural	=	ba-[3] zi-[4] ku-[5] concord of the plural class for equi-gender nouns
Singular	+	Singular	=	ba-[3] zi-[4] ku-[5] concord of the plural class if both nouns are identical in form and meaning
Singular	+	Plural	=	ba-[3] zi-[4] ku-[5]