# The grammar of gender: insights from Bantu

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Bantu languages typically have 5+ singular/plural pairs of noun classes. I focus mainly on the Xhosa pairings exemplified in (1)a-e:

(1) a. um-ntu/aba-ntu b. um-pu/imi-pu c. ili-so/ame-hlo d. isi-tya/izi-tya e. in-ja/izin-ja
1-/2-person 3-/4-gun 5-/6-eye 7-/8-dish 9-/10-dog
'person/s' 'gun/s' 'eye/s 'dish/es' 'dog/s'

These classes have some properties predictable from the *n* approach to grammatical gender proposed in Kramer (2015), and others which motivate novel conclusions. Based on asymmetries in agreement with conjuncts I argue that:

•Some genders are wholly uninterpretable. Agreement failures for matching [$_{\&P}$ sg & sg] provide a formal diagnostic for this because *u*genders are dropped in several circumstances, including from &Ps whose conjuncts mismatch the plurality of &P. Xhosa has two such genders including classes 3/4 in (2); Shona has at least three.

(2) Um-gewu nom-gulukudu ✓**ba** /✗**i**-sebenza ndawonye. [3+3=2, ≠4]
3-criminal and.3-gangster 2SM/ 4SM -work together
'A criminal and a gangster are working together.'

•Abundant *n*P stacking in Bantu yields [$_{nP1}$ *n*1 [$_{nP2}$ *n*2+ROOT]] as in (3), where *n*2s = *i*gender cores. There are three of these, for human-, animal-, and inanimate-denoting nouns.

(3) Sample structure of two human-denoting nouns: all have cores of 1/2

a. um-ntwana/aba-ntwana [*in*$_{1/2}$ √MNTWANA] *i*n of 1/2
1-child/2-children
'child/ren'

b. um-gewu/imi-gewu [*un*$_{3/4}$ [*in*$_{1/2}$ √GEWU]] *u*n of 3/4 stacks above 1/2
3-criminal/4-criminal
'criminal/s'

• So-called default agreement like *ba*- in (2) is formal, grammatical agr with *i*gender cores.

•In contrast, where a gender has both arbitrary and conceptually related members morpho-syntax treats all alike (see (4) and (5)) arguing against 'flavors' of a single gender.

(4) Um-mi nom-ongameli **ba**-ya-ncokola. [1+1=2]
1-citizen and.1-president 2SM-DISJ-chat
'The citizen and the president are chatting.'

(5) U-L no-M **ba**-se tafile-ni. [1+1=2]
1a-L and.1a-M 2SM-LOC table-LOC
'The L and the M are on the table.'

•Lastly, variability in agreement with [$_{\&P}$ pl & pl] is non-random, contrary to surface appearances, reflecting the same distinctions among kinds of genders.