

"Janus-headed" nominals: the morphosyntax of agreement in Taa

The Taa language complex of the Tuu family (a.k.a. "Southern Khoisan") is characterized by a gender system established by up to half a dozen agreement classes which index in addition to gender also a singular~plural distinction. These genders are reflected morphosyntactically by pronominal cross-reference and agreement. A particularly salient property in this respect is that different kinds of grammatical and lexical elements, inter alia adjectives, relative and possessive markers, prepositions, conjunctions, and transitive verbs, obligatorily index some nominal referent.

A typologically rare phenomenon is that agreement is triggered by linear adjacency, rather than syntactic configuration. That is, in case of cataphoric agreement, the concord is determined by the first possible nominal constituent, regardless of its syntactic function in the following material.

As an example, genitive constructions are head-final so that a preceding agreement host takes the concord of the modifying possessor, not of the possessee as the modified head. In case of agreement on both sides of such a construction, the noun phrase displays "ambidextrous" agreement: the cataphoric host indexes the initial modifier and the anaphoric host indexes the final head as shown in the following examples (class-1 agreement on the verb 'see' and class-3 agreement on the adjective 'big').

- (1) n si n|ai |huun n||aeh !xae
 1S IPFV see:1 white.1 house.3 big:3
 I see the white man's big house.

This also applies to nominals which would be expected to display a greater integrity of syntactic behavior like compounds and even nominal derivatives. While lexical units in semantic terms, such structures have thus a "janus-head"-like morphosyntax. This can be demonstrated with the lexeme for 'cloud' in (2) which is composed of the simplex nouns for 'rain' and 'house': it shows the same ambidextrous agreement as the genitive construction in (1).

- (2) n si n|ae ||kx'oe n||aeh 'oan
 1S IPFV see:3 rain house one:2a
 I see one cloud.