

Hunting for a semantic network in Bantu

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This communication presents the results of an investigation on the vocabulary for various relatively independent meanings in the Bantu languages. It shows that there is a semantic network between several concepts: “meat”, “animal”, “bush”, “horn”, “antelope”, “hunt(ing)”...

The relation between “meat” and “animal” is well known (Guthrie 1967-1971). With the reconstruction *-nyàmà (Bastin et al. 2002), the semantic blurring is in fact attested even beyond Bantu (Williamson, K. and K. Shimazu 1968).

With the data we collected in the same semantic field, we bring to light other cases of such stems with different meanings, sometimes through a change in the associated nominal class. Examples in (1) show that fact in one and a same language while examples in (2) call for a comparison between different languages.

(1)

H11 Kibeembe	mbúlú ‘jackal’ cl.9	~	kibúlú ‘animal’ cl.7
K12b Ngangela	káθitu ‘animal’ cl.12	~	múθitu ‘thicket along a river’ cl.3

(2)

(H11 Kibeembe) nséké ‘savanna’ cl.9	~	(C73 Nkutsu) nséké ‘horn’ cl.9
(L11 Pende) gibongo ‘horn’ cl.7	~	(B62 Mbaama) mbòηò ‘antelope bongo’ cl.9

Although they do not have a general distribution, the forms that we analyse allow to broaden the semantic network ‘meat / animal’. Through a mapping of the various

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semantic shifts they exhibit, we draw hypotheses that contribute to a better understanding of language contacts and linguistic history in the Bantu group.

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