

Semantic effects on Kirundi loanword phonology

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This paper provides an account of the phonological and semantic factors in the noun class allocation of loanwords in Kirundi (JD62) with OT. Kirundi loanwords are generally incorporated with class 9/10 null prefixes (Zorc and Nibagwire, 2007; Niyondagara, 1993; Niyonkuru, 1987). Loanwords beginning with resembling existing full nominal forms are generally reanalyzed as CL-N, which I argue is a result of alignment constraints maintaining source language word boundaries from the source language.

- (1) i-Ø₉-farine
AUG-CL9-flour
'flour'
- (2) i-ki₇-nini
AUG-CL7-pill
'pill'

However, there are several other semantic and phonologically motivated factors in determining noun class. I present several examples indicating that semantic factors override phonological criteria in select instances, such as when restrictions on the semantic content within a noun class block a noun whose phonological form would otherwise condition it to appear with a certain class prefix. The most apparent case is in human-denoting nouns, which most regularly appear in class 1/2, adding an overt prefix. Nonhuman-denoting loanwords with initial sounds resembling class 1/2 prefixes are unable to repurpose those segmental sequences to function as prefixes. I also demonstrate instances where phonological factors place nouns in noun classes that do not represent their semantic qualities. I demonstrate that neither phonological, perceptive, nor semantic factors can solely account for the allocation of noun class in Kirundi loanwords. The data indicates a clear interaction between phonological and semantic constraints relating to faithfulness and markedness, and describe a formal ranking capable of predicting the noun class allocation of novel loanwords in Kirundi. Further study of the interaction between semantics and phonology demands a unity of phonology and semantics.

References

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