# The noun concordance system: some remarks on nouns' participation in Bantu languages syntactic structure

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## Introduction

In Bantu languages, nouns' participation in syntactic structure is uniquely signaled by the commonly attested system of alliteration or concordance markers. In this paper we submit that noun concordancing is not only linear, forward moving or right hand inclined. While we indeed concede that this is the predominant syntactic pattern, nevertheless, we will argue, demonstrate and account for the occurrence of a left hand, backward alliteration where a noun phrase copies and signals its presence in syntax before it is actually encountered in the linear order of precedence.

Still within the realm of nouns' participation in syntax, this paper will also focus on the behavior of conjoined nouns. Here, the burden of our discussion shall be to demonstrate as well as attempt to explain the 'unorthodox' concordancing system of conjoined noun phrases which, in travesty of the norm, often elicit the concordance marker(s) of classes other than the ones from which they belong. While this commonly occurs with conjoined nouns that come from different classes in Bantu, it will for instance be demonstrated that for Shona, a conjoined subject nominal phrase will often control the alliterative prefixal morpheme of class 8 - *zvi-*. We shall formulate and apply stringent rules to account for this design of the language.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows – section 2 revisits the basic Bantu concordancing facts guided by the logic that it is always best to move from the known to the unknown. In section 3 we advance the argument that the Object Marker as a morphologic cataphoric reference doubles up in syntax as an example of backward concordancing. Section 4 examines the issue of concordial agreement in relation to particular types of conjoined noun phrases. Section 5 is an analysis of some noun phrases that are not conjoined as such but which are

deeply fascinating for their concordancing alternations. The concluding section is 6 and in it we sum up the main arguments of the entire paper [1].

**2.0 Revisiting the basic Bantu facts**

The noun as a lexical category and its accompanying behavior in syntax, morphology and other areas of linguistic competences has received ample and brilliant study. Evidence for this claim abounds in the studies of pioneering as well as the latter-day scholars of the Bantu group of languages, for example Bleek, Meinhof, Meeussen, Doke, Guthrie, Lestrade, and others. The noun's unique linguistic baggage – in particular its definition in lexicographic studies, its classification, morphological architecture as well as its participation in syntactic structures - is not lacking in both exemplification and elaboration. In fact so central and strategic is the noun's unique participation in various syntactic structures that one can tell the class of the head noun through recognition of the prefix that it copies onto the other parts of speech in the sentence. This particular property of the noun can, in conjunction with other criteria, be used as a criterion for determining a language's membership to the Bantu group of languages. In elaboration of this claim Guthrie (1970: 47) observes thus:

> '… in Bantu languages grammatical concord is operated by means of prefix agreement, a fact which is moreover one of the criteria used to determine whether or not a given language is to be accepted as Bantu'

The grammatical concord that Guthrie refers to which we have also already made reference forms the sheet anchor upon which this whole paper draws both its grounding and legitimacy. The system of agreement concords is one of the outstanding characteristics of Bantu. Agreement can in part also be used as an ancillary to noun classification owing to the fact that nouns belonging to the same class morpho-syntactically behave alike in regard to their prefixes. This is the same point that again Guthrie (1970) notes in the following: 'The simplest kind of classification is one in which a class consists of all those words which require or display a particular set of agreements.' More recently, Chimhundu and Chabata (2007: 161) define concordial agreement in Shona as follows

> Uku kufanana kana kupindarana kunoita zvivakashure nezvimwe zviumbamazwi muchirevo. Kazhinji sungawirirano inoumbwa kubva pamupanda wezita rinenge richitaurwa nezvaro, uye kuwirirana kwacho kunobatawo nyaya yeuwandu neushoma.Mazwi anotevera

zita kana kuti anotaura nezvezita anofanira kunge ane hochekoche nezita racho …

(This is the similarity and agreement which takes place between prefixes and other affixes in a phrase. In most cases concordial agreement derives from the class of the noun which is the subject of discussion and agreement also touches on the singular-plural issue. The words that follow a noun or which refer to a noun must agree with the same …)

The above remarks and observations that we have made in relation to the noun are critical to the argument that we husband in this exposition. It is the one important burden of this paper to now demonstrate the claims that have been made vis-à-vis the noun and its participation in syntax in a random sample of Bantu languages.

Consider the following illustrative sentences provided below:

**Shona**

1(a) **Chi**-ngwa **cho**-mwana **ch**-a-dy-iw-a **ch**ose ne-mbwa
l7-bread of7-child SM7-Past-V-Pass-TV 7all by-9/dog
The child's bread has all been eaten by the dog.

(b) **Mu**-komana **wa**-Saru a-end-**a** ku-Harare
1-boy of1-Saru SM1a-Rec.Past-V-TV 17-Harare
Saru's boyfriend has gone to Harare.

**Chichewa**

2 (a) **Chi**tsiru **chi**-na-gul-ir-a atsikana mphatso
7-fool 7S-PST-buy-AP-FV 2-girls 9-gift
'The fool bought a gift for the girls.'

(b) **A**nyani **a**-ku-phwany-ir-a dengu mwala
**2**-baboons **2** S-PR-break-AP-FV 5-basket 3-stone
'The baboons are breaking the basket with a stone.'
(Alsina and Mchombo; 1993:21)

**Kiswahili**

3 (a) **wi**mbo huu mrefu **u**-ta-faa
**11**song **11**this **11**long **11**agr-pres-suffice
'This long song will do.'

(b) nyimbo hizi ndefu zi-ta- faa
**10**song **10**these **10**long **10**agr-fut-suffice
'These long songs will do.'
(Carstens; 1993:159)

**Ndebele**

4 (a) **Aba**-fana **ba**-ya-dlal-a i-bhola
2-boys 2SM-PRS-play-FV 5-ball
'The boys are playing football.'

( b) **Izi**-lwane **zi**-ya-m-bon-a
10-lions SM10-PRS-OM1-see-FV
'The lions see him.'
(Shenk; u.d.; 12-14)

**Lozi**

5 (a) **mu**sole **a**taba yomunde
The soldier will be good

(b) **mu**lilo **u**taba yomunde
The fire will be good
(Guthrie; 1970: 48)

**Bemba**

6 (a) **aba**lunsi **ba**leeyisa

The hunters are coming

(b) **i**sabi **li**mbi naalibola
The other fish is rotten, or
The other fish are rotten.
(Guthrie; 1970; 51-52)

siSwati

7 (a) **Ema**-ntfombatane a-bon-a si-hlahla
**6**-girl **SM6**/TENS-see-FV **7**-tree
'The girls see a tree.'

(b) U**mu**-ti wa-khe **u**-seti kwe-ntsaba
**3**-home of-his **SM3**-up of-10\hill
'His home is up the hill.'

(Zondo: pc)

**Changana (Zimbabwe)**

8 (a) **Mu**-fana **u**-fambhil-e khaya ka-yena
1-boy SM1-went-FV ?5home of-his
'The boy went to his home.'

(b) **Manani** na-**tatani** **va**-yil-e ma-simwini
1mother and-1father SM2-go-FV 6-field
'Mother and father had gone to the fields.'

(Mabaso; 2004:27)

A number of critical points need to be brought to our attention in relation to sentences 1 to 8. For instance, one important architectural design of Bantu languages that can already be confirmed from the above is that they are configurational in character. The configurational design conforms with a systematic syntactic patterning that is in keeping with the Subject:Verb:Object (SVO) linear computation. Some two and perhaps commonplace deductions which have strong implications for our basic thesis here can also be further inferred from this linear design. The first observation is that in terms of the basic structure, the noun alone contributes more than two-thirds of the entire burden of the SVO syntactic hub. Thus in terms of the form of participating components alone, the basic SVO structure can be rewritten as follows NP:V:NP. The other point being raised in view of the above is that the SVO structure is perceptually directional. In elaboration, there is an unmistakable left-to-right stringing or concatenation of syntactic components the sum total of which go to build up either a phrase, a clause or sentence.

It has been suggested in some linguistic literature by some, for example, Chafe (1970) that in a dichotomized world of verbs and nouns, the former can be said to be central while the latter are peripheral. The morphosyntactic interaction of the verb and noun in Bantu languages may indeed well challenge this assertion, at least in the realm of the syntactic world of Bantu where the noun is inextricably interwoven with other parts of speech. The centrality of the noun is given further credence to by Shenk (nd.; 7) whose observations in regard to Ndebele can unquestionably be extrapolated for other Bantu languages. Writes Shenk:

> In Ndebele the noun is extremely important because it controls the formation of the verbs, adjectives, relatives and possessives. All parts of speech are brought into agreement with the nouns by means of concords referring to the noun.

In Bantu languages, therefore, the noun, associated with its classification idiosyncrasies and everything else that refers to it in the sentence, crucially the grammatical agreement markers, plays a pivotal role in the delivery of information that is borne by the sentence. Prefixes as grammatical agreement markers become also quite critical in the necessary logic of disambiguating referential participants occurring in the same information structure that is operationalised through syntax. The disambiguation is achieved among other things by nominal features which comprise gender, class and number. Below is an attempt to diagrammatize the relationship that exists between the noun phrase and the entire sentence itself.

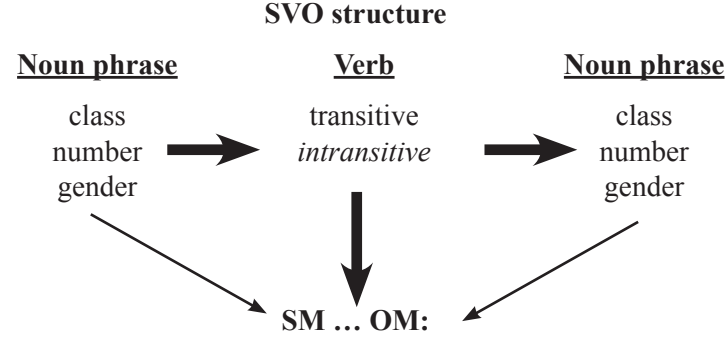



***Figure 1***

In Figure 1 above, an attempt is made to represent in perhaps the simplest way possible the syntactic contract that NPs and the verb enter into in the context of the SVO computation. It is evident in the schema that the NP stands guard on either side of the transitive verb and the relation that accrues is also marked by various agreement or concordance markers within the verb complex. The generalized abstract schema in Figure 1 cannot however be used to demonstrate concordancing *per se*. That will be done in the appropriate sections of this discussion. The verb complex that has been made mention of constitutes the predicate hub whose membership comprises the following morphemes: Negative Marker (NM), Subject Marker (SM), Tense/Aspect (Tense), Object Marker (OM), Verb Stem (VS), Verb Extension(s), Final Vowel (FV) Honour/ Plural Marker (H/PM).

Figure 1 can also be further represented in terms of branching tree diagrams as shown in Figure 2 below:

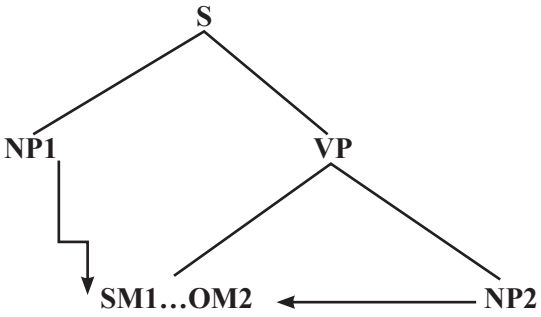



***Figure 2***

In Figure 3, we take a practical Ndebele example (4a) and render it in terms of the schema in Figure 2. All the sixteen illustrative structures given above that originate from ten different Bantu languages can with minor modifications be fitted within the schemata exemplified in Figures 1 through to 3. Perhaps the major difference that may be responsible for the slight modifications and alterations will relate to argument structure

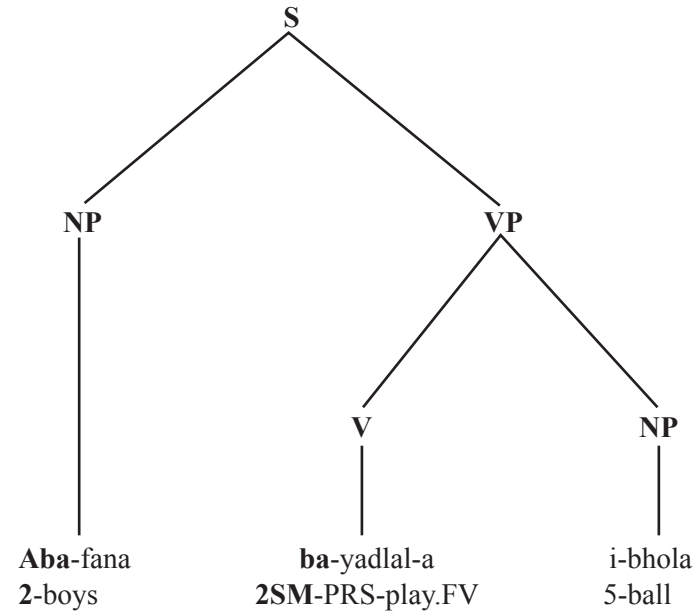



***Figure 3***

and the subcategorisation of verbs into transitive and intransitive to the extent that intransitive verbs inherently cannot have two argument NPs while transitive verbs will obligatorily have an object NP complementing the verb and in the process completing the SVO structure as attested earlier. However, predicate argument structure is not the central concern of our discussion. Currently our chief concern has been to reiterate and summarize the main observations about Bantu because they will form the springboard and major point of departure for this discussion.

For our current purposes, the major point to note is that in Bantu, every member that belongs to the nominal category perforce equally belongs also to a specific group of nouns that displays identifiable characteristics chief among which are gender, number and person. While we emphasise these features, it is also true that nouns can further be subcategorized into the following; [±common], [±human], [±count], [±abstract], [±animate] etc. (Dembetembe; 1981:104). What is most interesting about Bantu is that the lexical-nominal information that is borne by

the nominal entity is in the realm of syntactic structure copied onto the predicate by means of affixes that agree with it. The said agreement is operationalised through grammatical concords. As earlier noted from Shenk, the same lexical-nominal information is also morphologically copied onto other grammatical categories comprising relatives, adjectives, possessives, quantifiers and other such substantive constructions. This system by which the noun announces its presence anaphorically, in the case of the subject and cataphorically in the case of the object function is achieved through a system of alliteration that is borne by the phonology of the prefix.

The other obvious, but equally important point to underline is that normally, concordial agreement, in sympathy with the SVO configuration is necessarily directional. In elaboration of this observation, there is an unmistakable left-to-right alignment and accumulation of elements that participate in syntax, regardless of whether or not they are fully-fledged NPs, or anaphors such as prefixes, subject markers, clitics or any other affixes that rendezvous around the predicate. This also rings true even in the tiny sample of Bantu languages that has been provided above. It has been seen that both within the NP syntax alone as well as within the VP, the noun always leaves its mark with a fronted or prominent predicate-initial position for the subject NP, while the object NP's marker is an incorporated clitic immediately antecedent to the verb root itself. And this brings an asymmetric behavior between the subject and object agreement marking where the subject agreement takes an initial position while object agreement is sandwiched within the verb complex.

Crucial to the discussion at hand, this system by which the noun copies its prefixal marker to other parts of speech will for our current purposes be called *forward concordancing*. *Forward concordancing* as will be demonstrated subsequently, stands in contradistinction to *backward concordancing*, The phenomenon of *backward concordancing* will be demonstrated to occur under particular NP combinations and configurations as well as under certain syntactic constructional conditions.

### 3.1 The object marker and the backward concordancing phenomenon

In terms of concordial agreement, it is therefore without much dispute that the subject grammatical relation, owing perhaps to its sentence-initial position

is intrinsically and/or typically *forward concordancing*. However, from the behavior of both the subject and object functions we may infer and draw some general rule that captures their grammatical agreement character as follows:

> Every morphosyntactic element that participates subsequent to the head noun will be concordially marked by the same and will thus agree with it.

In illustration of this point, the structures in 1 (a) for Shona and 3 (a) and (b) for Kiswahili which are made up of complex subject NPs shall be referred to here. In 1 (a), the subject NP is a possessive noun phrase where the possessive affix of class 7 cho- is concordially occasioned by the head noun chingwa of class 7. In 3 (a) and (b) the subject noun phrases, respectively, *wimbo huu mrefu* and *nyimbo hizi ndefu* have their heads as *wimbo*, class 11 and *nyimbo* class 10 which in turn influence the qualifying demonstrative phrases *huu mrefu* and *hizi ndefu,* respectively. We may schematically represent the intra-NP concordial system using 3 (b) subject NP as follows:

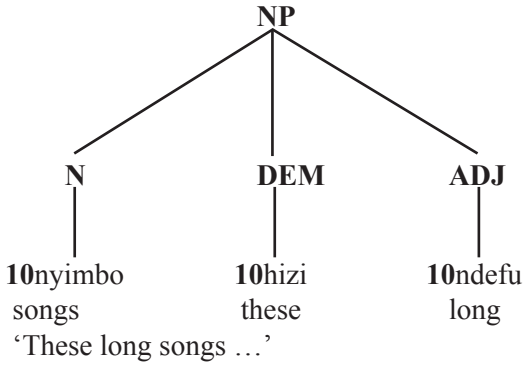



***Figure 4***

From the structures above, it is therefore evident that the NP influences the concordial agreement of other elements that participate with it in syntax in two ways; Intra-NP and Extra-NP. Figure 4 gives an example of Intra-NP phenomenon while the majority of examples cited earlier give evidence of Extra-NP influence. Extra-NP influence can be demonstrated in the various NP affixes that agglutinate around the predicate, for which the latter is usually an argument of the same.

The argument that we would like to propose in this section relates to the object marker. Concerning the same, we shall here argue that Object Marker (OM) is a concordial agreement marker. And we shall not stop at that, we will characterize the OM as providing an illustration of *backward concordancing*. This line of argument posits of the OM as having a dual function, that is; pronominalisation as well as backward concordancing or agreement. Figure 2 already fore grounded this relationship of the object NP vis-à-vis the verbal complex. Consider the example in 9 (Bresnan & Moshi; 1993: 50-51)

9 (a) N-a-i-lyi-i-a m-ka k-elya
FOC-1 S-PR-eat-AP-FV 1-wife 7-food
'He is eating food for/on his wife.'

(b) N-a-i-m-lyi-i-a k-elya **[*m-ka*]2**[2]
FOC-1S-PR-**1 O**-eat-AP-FV 7-food
'He/She is eating food for/on him/her.'

(c) N-a-i-ki-lyi-i-a m-ka [***k-elya***]
FOC-1 S-PR-**7 O**-eat-AP-FV 1-wife
'He/She is eating it for/on the wife.'

(d) N-a-i-ki-m-lyi-i-a [***k-elya***] [***m-ka***]**3**[3]
FOC-1 S-PR-7 O-1 O-eat-AP-FV
'He/She is eating it for/on him/her.'

In the Kichaga illustrations availed above, it is apparent that in 9 (b) the direct object **mka** of class 1 cataphorically marks its presence in the sentence by means of an incorporated pronominal marker **–m-** which agrees in class with the class 1 noun. The same can be said of the secondary object ***kelya*** in the subsequent 9 (c) structure where the object marker of class 7 is positioned in a slot immediately preceding the verb – *eat*. To the extent that a post-verbal NP

deposits and/or copies its prefixal agreement marker within the verbal complex before it is encountered in the linear order of the sentence, we here witness what we have come to characterize as evidence of the phenomenon of *backward concordancing*.

While this phenomenon has been illustrated using Kichaga, it is indeed correct to say that all the other languages shown earlier do exhibit this ability of the object to cataphorically *backward concordance* and/or agree. Below is an illustration of this point using Chichewa and siSwati which earlier were numbered respectively as 2 and 7. For continuity and ease of numbering we shall recast them respectively as 10 and 11.

10 (a) **Chi**tsiru **chi**-na-gul-ir-a atsikana mphatso
7-fool 7S-PST-buy-AP-FV 2-girls 9-gift
'The fool bought a gift for the girls.'

(b) Chitsiru chi-na-**wa**-gul-ir-a mphatso (**atsikana**)
7-fool 7S-PST-2 **O**-buy-AP-FV 9-gift **2**-girls
'The fool bought a gift for them.'
(Alsina & Mchombo; 1993:22)

11 (a) **Ema**-ntfombantane **a**-bon-a si-hlahla
**6**-girl **SM6**-PRS-see-FV 7-tree
'The girls see a tree.'

(b) Ema-ntfombantane a-ya-si-bon-a si-hlahla
6-girl SM6-PRS-**OM7**-see-FV **7-hlahla**
'The girls see it, the tree.'

There however certainly seems to be a language-preference aspect with respect to the overt expression of the post-verbal NP once it has copied its concordance marker within the verb complex. From 9 (b) above, it would seem then that in Chichewa, the expression of the full NP (***atsikana***) is optional. We are not in a position to tell whether or not for siSwati, the overt expression of ***sihlahla*** is optional or obligatory. But from Bergvall's (1987) comparison of Kiswahili and

Gikuyu, it would seem that with regard to the said languages, Gikuyu does not permit the co-occurrence of the object marker together with the post-verbal NP while in Kiswahili both the post-verbal object NP and its prefixal marker can co-occur in the same structure. The co-occurrence restrictions of the NP and the object maker or object prefix may need further comparative studies with a huge pool of Bantu languages. In the meantime we would here like to conjecture that one of the chief co-occurrence restrictions may reside in discourse analysis. From the view point of discourse, it would seem to us that if the post-verbal NP constitutes old and/or understood information, it may be a good candidate for optional expression while if the same NP belongs to the category of new information, it would then become a candidate for obligatory expression, with or without the occurrence of the object prefix depending on the typological restrictions of the language in question.

While we have felt it redundant to delve deep into the definition of concordial agreement as it has been traditionally attested, there may indeed be need here to define what we have termed *backward concordancing* – which we thus define *as the cataphoric ability of a noun to copy its agreement markers to antecedent morphosyntactic formations*. In the context of the sentence, the NP that functions as the subject is first encountered owing to its sentence-initial slot before it then anaphorically copies itself in the verbal complex by means of a prefixal agreement marker. In the reverse, the object copies itself and 'foreshadows' its participation in the sentence by an incorporated object marker before it is overtly encountered either adjacent to the verb or as some possessive, quantitative or some such substantive. It goes without saying that what is being described here relates to transitive sentences which of necessity bear post-verbal object arguments expressible in syntax as NPs. For this reason, the subject may be said to possess the feature [+anaphor] while the object displays the feature [+cataphor]. The anaphoric and cataphoric morphosyntactic behavior of these NPs has implications for our basic argument as it relates to forward and *backward agreement* marking.

### 3.2 Backward concordancing: the 'prototypical' case

In this section we will argue as well as demonstrate that there are other types of syntactic constructions that provide evidence of backward concordancing. Consider the following constructions from Shona:

12 (a) **Chi-sungo** **cha**-i-ve nzira ye-kusimbisa u-kama
7-agreement SM7-HBT-AUX 9/path of-INFN- 14-relationship

'The agreement was a way of strengthening the relationship.'

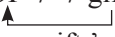
(b) Chi-sungo **ya**-i-ve **nzira** ye-kusimbisa u-kama
7-agreement SM/9-HBT-AUX 9/path of-INFT 14-relationship

'The agreement was a way of strengthening the relationship.'

13 (a) **N'ombe** idzi ndi**dzo** chipo chako
10/cattle DEM COP-10 7-gift 7/yours

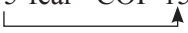
'These cattle are your gift.'

(b) N'ombe idzi ndi**cho** **chi-po** chako
10/cattle DEM COP-7 7-gift 7/yours



'These cattle are your gift.'

14 (a) **Ku-tya** ndi**ko** chi-nhu chakaipa
15-fear COP-15 7-thing REL/bad

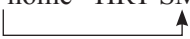


'Fear is a bad thing.'

(b) Ku-tya ndi**cho** **chi-nhu** chakaipa
15-fear COP-7 7-thing REL/bad

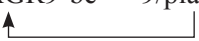
'Fear is a bad thing.'

15 (a) **Mu-sha** nga-**u**-ve nzvimbo yakanaka
3-home HRT-SM3-be 9/place REL/good



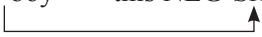
'The home should be a beautiful place.'

(b) Mu-sha nga-i-ve nzvimbo yakanaka
3-home HRT-AGR9-be 9/place REL/good



'The home should be a beautiful place.'

16.1 (a) **Mu-koma** uyu ha-**a**-si benzi
1-boy this NEG-SM1-not 5/fool



'This boy is not a fool.'

16.1 (b) Mu-komana uyu ha-**ri**-si **benzi**
1-boy this NEG-AGR5-not 5/fool

'This boy is not a fool.'

The data presented in 12 to 16 above is quite interesting in several crucial ways. The first observation being made is that both (a) and (b) minimal pair sentences are equally grammatical and acceptable. The second point to note is that both sentences are identical in the meaning they convey. The chief difference between the pair relates only to a differential in the class of concordial agreement separating (a) from (b) structure. We are yet to find Shona speakers who display a particular preference between the two kinds of agreement. However, in each case, the (a) structure shows anaphoric prefixal agreement between the subject of the sentence and the rest of the other grammatical formations in the sentence. This is the traditional and/or predominant concordial agreement type that we are all familiar with.

For the purposes of this paper, we have also termed this type of agreement *forward concordancing* or *forward agreement* to the extent that that this is the type of agreement that follows the linear order of syntactic elements in conformity with the SVO configurational structure of the languages. As an iconic aid, arrows have been drawn in each illustration to indicate, not only the noun and the immediate element that it agrees with but we have also indicated through the same, the left or right direction of agreement.

As indicated earlier, *forward concordancing* or forward agreement stands in contradistinction to backward concordancing. The latter is demonstrably cataphoric. As is evident in all the structures in (b), agreement marking is backward looking to the extent that we in each case first encounter an incorporated clitic that refers to an NP that is then subsequently encountered in the linear order of precedence. This is the kind of concordancing which in our opinion still needs

to be further explored in different Bantu languages. This phenomenon cannot be restricted to Shona alone. In terms of the established norms, this type of *backward agreement* somewhat violates the SVO architecture of the languages' fundamental design.

In Tables 1 and 2 below an attempt is made to prune from sentences 12 to 16 all the other parts of speech with which the phenomena of backward concordancing and forwarding concordancing are exemplified. This leaves us with Table 1 showing in a visually simpler way the forward concordial agreement between the subject NPs and their agreement markers. Backward facing arrows have been used to show nouns that backward agree with the other elements that participate with them in the sentences in question. Table 2 also attempts to do what has been done in Table 1 while in the reverse giving illustration to the phenomenon of backward concordial agreement.

**Forward concordial agreement**

| | **Subject NP** | **Agr.M** | **Condition** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 (a) | **chi**-sungo | **cha-** | Auxiliary |
| 13 (a) | **Ø**/n'ombe | **-dzo** | Copulative |
| 14 (a) | **ku**-tya | **-ko** | Copulative |
| 16 (a) | **mu**-sha | **-u** | Hortative |
| 16.1(a) | **mu**-komana | **-a-** | Auxiliary |

**Table 1**

**Backward concordial agreement**

| | Agr.M | Object NP | Condition |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 (b) | **ya-** | **Ø**/nzira | Auxiliary |
| 13 (b) | **-cho** | **chi-**po | Copulative |
| 14 (b) | **-cho** | **chi-**nhu | Copulative |
| 15 (b) | **-i** | **Ø**/nzvimbo | Hortative |
| 16.1(a) | **-ri-** | **Ø**/benzi | Auxiliary |

**Table 2**

### 3.2.1 The backward concordancing condition

With regard to the Shona examples provided above, it would be misleading to give the impression that backward concordancing can always occur in free variation with *forward concordancing*. Free variation of such a nature would be unsystematic and an impediment to language acquisition. There is however no doubt that *backward agreement* arises in association with particular syntactic phenomena which as observed in 12 to 16 and reiterated in Tables 1 and 2 above seem to occur in conjunction with the presence of the Auxiliary, the Copulative and the Hortative constructions. We shall collectively term these and similarly behaving constructions the *Backward Agreement Condition* (BAC). We strongly suspect that upon further research, there might be more such constructions which we assume are all overarched by BAC. It is our submission that there is need for further research in this rather grey area in order to come up with perhaps a tighter and more stringent explanation for what we have here termed the *Backward Agreement* Condition.

However, before a full and, perhaps, more satisfying explanation is available we would like to propose, citing the particular instances provided above, that an intervening copulative, auxiliary or hortative construction necessarily blocks the subject NP from copying its agreement directly onto the verbal complex. This special blockade allows for the said constructions to create special conditions that license auxiliary NP objects to backward concordance. Pending further

research, it would seem at the moment that constructions such as the auxiliary that trigger the *Backward Agreement Condition* are, under this Condition analogous to the regular predicates in which NPs that are adjacent to them in the post-verbal slot are their object complements. In the same way that a post-verbal NP object marks within the verb complex, so in like manner, the object of the copulative for instance, is allowed to copy its presence with a prefixal marker within the copulative, the hortative or the auxiliary construction in a manner similar to what an object NP does in a regular SVO syntactic structure. BAC and its triggers are therefore unique in that they block subject marking completely and therefore impede regular, forward moving concordancing and/or agreement. By blocking the phenomenon of *forward concordancing*, they open the way for *backward agreement* by allowing the adjacent NP to cataphorically pronominalise within them. In explanation to this phenomenon, there is an undoubted rule in Bantu which renders NP agreement obligatory. Prototypically then, first preference is accorded to *forward concordancing* in the absence of which backward concordance immediately takes over as what happens under BAC.

As earlier pointed out, the SVO configuration of Bantu languages hypothesizes that the basic sentence comprises in terms of form alone the following stringing of elements within it - NP:V:NP. In elaboration, this means that there are two noun phrases that have an intervening verbal unit between them. While this picture is indeed true, the world of linguistic reality is however not always as neat as one would prefer. The next section is going to focus on issues arising out of a disturbance of this basic structure and the implication of the same on NP concordancing in general.

### 4.1 Conjoined nominal agreement

This section's preoccupation is the concordial agreement behavior of conjunct nouns. Nouns as a grammatical category are stand-alone lexical units that can be classified using different conventions and criteria. The classification of individual nouns as a linguistic exercise poses surmountable challenges. Pioneers of Bantu research classified nouns using gender, person and number. It is also apparent that nouns were classified using the syntactic criterion as perhaps circumstantial evidence since Bantu languages have among other things, 'A concord system within the class system.' Miti (2006: 45) quoting Guthrie (1948). It is inconceivable to arrive at the knowledge and evidence of

nominal concords without taking recourse to the syntactic stratum of language expression and/or competence. In the traditional, classification scheme, nouns must have been studied as individual or groups of lexical items that could be allocated to each the following characteristics; person, number and gender. It is doubtful whether the problems associated with conjoined nouns that we would like to discuss here and which were earlier examined by scholars such as Doke (1967) Dembetembe (1981) and Bosch (1985) and others were anticipated then.

While single nouns that act as either the subject or object of the sentence have been fairly straightforward in regard to grammatical agreement, certainly the same cannot be said of conjoined nouns. Most fascinating of this category is the conjunct subject. The subject becomes particularly interesting because in Bantu once it is expressed in syntax, it is obligatory for it to copy its concord marker on the other parts of speech in the clause in keeping with a simple rule that was stated in section 3.

This rule first affects the subject by virtue of its sentence-initial position in syntax. In satisfaction of this rule therefore it has been demonstrated that the subject copies its prefixal agreement markers to other grammatical categories in the clause. These agreement markers as is well known agree in number, person and gender with the subject noun. This is the same point which in reiteration is described by Carstens (1993: 152) as follows:

> Class membership determines the type of agreement borne by a noun's modifiers and complements, and by auxiliaries and verbs in relevant syntactic relations with it.

The question that we ask relates to the behavior of conjoined nouns – how they behave in regard to concordial agreement. We certainly cannot expect them to behave as if they were a single nominal referent. It is also instructive at this point to bear in mind that conjoined noun phrases fit into the following schema; **NP and NP** →. Consider the sentences provided below where all the conjoined subject nouns belong to the same class:

**seSotho**

17 **Ba**nana na **ba**shanyana **ba** bona sefate
**2**-boys and **2**-girls **2** see 7-tree
'Boys and girls see a tree.'
(Anonymous)

**Chichewa**

18 Mbizi ndi nkhandwe **zi**-ku-menyana
**10**-zebras and **10**-foxes **10**-SM-pres-hit-recip-FV
'The zebras and the foxes are hitting each other.'
(Mchombo; 1993:191)

**isiZulu**

19 **Ama**doda na**ma**khosikazi **a**zohlala lapha
6-men and/6-women **6SM**-sit here
'Men and women will stay here.'

(Bosch, in Canonici; 1995: 12)

**Shona**

20 **Ma**-kudo na**ma**-pere **a**-ka-pera kuuraiwa
6-baboons and/6-hyenas 6SM-PST-finish-FV 15-kill
'The baboons and hyenas were all killed.'

**Changana - Zimbabwe**

21 Manani natatani vayile masimwini
**1a**-mother na**1a**-father **2SM**-PST-go-FV 6-fields
'Mother and father had gone to the fields.'
(Mabaso; 2004:27)

The above sample sentences that are taken from five different Bantu languages give a somewhat misleading picture concerning the behavior of conjoined noun phrases, as they seem to suggest that conjoined noun phrases belonging to the same class normally control the subject agreement marker of the class to which they belong. In our research, Bosch (1985), is one scholar who came up with a list of comprehensive rules in dealing with conjoined nouns. His conclusions were summarized by Canonici (1995). We will extract some rules from Bosch (1985) in an order of our own making so as to fit in with the exigencies of the present discussion. Bosch (cited in Canonic: 1985) promulgated a total of 8 rules altogether for Zulu. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the said rules were distilled from the behavior of a single language and one is uncertain as to the extent they may be extrapolated for other Bantu languages. What is most heartening about the effort is that it provides an informed starting point in

spite of some apparent weaknesses that one may encounter upon closer scrutiny of them.

**The Bosch rules:**

> Bosch Rule 1:
> *Class 2 concord (ba-) for personal nouns:*
>
> Bosch Rule 2:
> *The plural of a noun class can be used if all the nouns belong to that class*
>
> Bosch Rule 3:
> *Singular nouns of the same class may be represented by the plural concord of the same class (number solution)*.

In application of the Bosch Rules as stated above, it would seem that sentences 17 and 21 are catered for by Rule 1 which dictates that class 2 concord (**ba-**) can be used for personal nouns. Perhaps the weakness of this particular Rule is that sentence 20 which has two personal conjoined nouns, *amadoda* and *amakhosikazi* is not placed under it but it is instead placed under Rule 2. The said rule states that the plural of a noun class can be used if all the conjoined nouns belong to that class. Thus number is allowed to take precedence over person and this strikes one as somewhat counter-intuitive. This takes out the special status of personal nouns that one gets the impression are especially catered for under Rule 1. And as will be demonstrated further down, this seems also to be in violation of the provisions and assumptions of the Person-Animacy Hierarchy.

However, going back to the set of sentences in 17 to 21, it would seem that 18 and 20 are catered for under Rule 3. At the same time, though 21 involves personal nouns, it can still be successfully placed under Rule 3 which allows singular conjoined nouns to control the subject agreement marker of their plural class. Perhaps the fact that different examples can be cited under two different Rules is because as Canonici (1995: 13) observes '…these rules are not water-tight…' This somewhat takes out the stringency and authority that rules are meant to invoke. There is an ad hoc element that may be associated with their lack of tightness.

It will be noticed that all the examples deployed above exhibit conjoined subject nouns that all conveniently belong to the same nominal class. The picture does not however remain as neat as a researcher would perhaps long for when we begin to have conjoined subject nouns that belong to different classes. Below are some such sentences:

**seSotho**

22 Banana le likhomo **??** bona sefate
**2**-girls and **?5** **??** see 7-tree
'The girls and the cattle see a tree.'

**Chichewa**

23 Mbidzi ndi **m**kango **??-**ku-menyana
**10**-zebras and **3**-lions **??-SM**-pres-hit-recip-FV
'The zebras and the lions are hitting each other.'
(Adapted from Mchombo; 1993)

**isiZulu**

23 (a) Umalume nezinja zakhe uzingela ehlathini
**1**-uncle and**8**-dogs his **SM1**-hunt in5-forest
'Uncle and his dogs are hunting in the forest.'

(b) Umkhwekazi … nezigebengu **za**zikona
**1**-?mother-in-law … and**8**-robbers S**M8**-PST-present-FV
'The mother-in-law and the robbers were present.'
(Bosch in Canonici; 1995:12-13)

**Shona**

24 (a) **Mu**-rume na-**ma**-pere **zva**-kwidz-an-a mu-gomo
**1**-man and-**6**-hyena **SM8**-climb-RCP-FV 18-mountain
'The man and the hyenas have sent each other up the hill.'
'The man has sent the hyenas up the hill.'

(b) *Mu-rume na-ma-pere **a/a**-kwidz-an-a mu-gomo
**1**-man and-**6**-hyena **1/6**-climb-RCP-FV 18-mountain

25 (a) Tichaona na-Sarudzai va\zvi-no-d-an-a
**1a**\Tichaona and-**1a**\Sarudzai **2\8SM**-PRS-love-RECP-FV
'Tichaona and-Sarudzai love each other.'

(b) *Tichaona na-Sarudzai a-no-d-an-a
**1a**/Tichaona and-**1a**Sarudzai **a**-no-d-an-a

26 (a) N'ombe na-**ma**-dhongi **zvi**-no-fur-a pamwe
**10**/cattle and-**6**-donkeys **8SM**-HBT-graze-FV 16-together
'Cattle and donkeys graze together.'

(b) *N'ombe na-**ma**-dhongi **dzi**/**a**-no-fur-a pamwe
**10**/cattle and-**6**-donkeys **10/6**-HBT-graze-FV 16-together

**Changana-Zimbabwe**

27 Tatani ne-rhole **??**-yile ma-simwini
**1a**-father and-***5**-calf **??**-PST-go-FV 6-fields
'Father and the calf had gone to the fields.'

Above is a cluster of sentences all having conjoined subject nouns from different Bantu languages. Apart from being Bantu, what else is common among them is the fact that their agreement concords are 'logically inconsistent'. In other words, they do not take their subject prefixal concords from 'expected classes'. In 27 (a), we have for instance two class 1a proper nouns - Tichaona and Sarudzai and they are jointly and in alternation controlling the class concords of classes 2 and 8 respectively.

One revealing observation that we also made while we were working on this research is the paucity of the use of conjoined nouns in the hundreds of illustrative examples that that we encountered in a fairly large corpus of Bantu linguistic studies. In this huge haystack of Bantu data, conjoined nouns indeed stick out as the proverbial needle and when they do occur. They are chiefly associated with specialized articles that specifically focus on this type of research. There certainly are other studies [4] of conjoined nouns in Bantu but in our case we have only been able to find studies by Bosch (1985) in Canonici (1995) for isiZulu and Dembetembe (1982) for Shona. And even in the said studies, there is an unmistakable ring of hesitancy for some rules provided while in some cases the solutions for conjoined nouns come across as somewhat contrived and prescriptive in character. Otherwise the vast majority of what one

tends to come across in Bantu linguistic literature is an abundance of single nominal subjects and objects whose deployment in syntax poses no concordial agreement challenges at all, results which are not extremely pleasing for the present discussion.

In Table 3 below, we demonstrate the results accruing from conjoining nouns in different classes. We hope that the special emphasis on class numbers that the instrument of the table affords can help us arrive at some informed conclusions in regard to conjoined nouns.

**The permutations of some conjoined subject NPs**

| **Language** | **Sentence #** | **Classes of conjoined NPs** | **Class of conjoined concord** |
|---|---|---|---|
| seSotho | 22 | 2 & 5 | ? |
| Chichewa | 23 | 10 & 3 | ? |
| isiZulu | 23 (a) | 1 & 8 | 1 |
| | (b) | 1 & 8 | 8 |
| Shona | 24 (a) | 1 & 6 | 8 |
| | (b) | 1 & 6 | *1a/6 |
| | 25 (a) | 1a & 1a | 2/8 |
| | (b) | 1a & 1a | *1a |
| | 28 (a) | 10 & 6 | 8 |
| | (b) | 10 & 6 | *10/6 |
| Changana | 29 | 1a & 5 | ? |

**Table 3**

The results in Table 3 above are quantitatively only but a tiny sample of the entire picture of the syntactic behavior of conjoined nouns in Bantu. Nevertheless, there are some qualitative conclusions that can be drawn from it. The relative paucity of cases in which conjoined nouns are used either in the subject or object positions may be an indication that Bantu languages do not prefer to use the conjoined nouns and where information may need to be conveyed involving such, the languages prefer other strategies for achieving the same such as splitting the subjects or the objects. Lending support to this observation, Dembetembe (1981:112) comments thus, 'Normally we tend to avoid conjoining such noun

phrases. The human noun phrase is given the privilege of controlling concordial agreement while the non-human noun phrase is made an adverbial of some sort, usually a prepositional phrase.' Bosch (1985) as quoted by Canonici (1995:13) gives the following as examples of splitting subjects;

28 (a) Umalume uzingela nezinja zake
Uncle hunts with his dogs.

(b) Umhambi uyagula nexhegu liyagula
The traveller is ill as well as the old man.

(c) Umama uyagula nobaba akaphilile
Mother is ill and father is not well either.

In each of the sentences in 28 (a) to (c) there are two nouns involved which could have been syntactically conjoined, but they have been split instead. In 28 (a) there is *umalume* and *izinja* all involved in the hunting event while in 28 (b), *umhambi* and *ixhegu* are involved in the intransitive action of being sick. 28 (c) has two participants, mother and father who are both sick. All the conjoined nouns are in an associative adverbial relationship that is signaled by the employment of the adverbial morpheme *na-* and its allomorphs.

It is evident that different languages seem to adopt different approaches to the problem. In 23 (a) and (b) above isiZulu seems to be fairly flexible and perhaps pragmatic. 23 (a) seems to operate under what we may term Bosh Rule 4 which simply states that the "*The concord of the first noun can be used, especially if this noun is given special status*.' For the given example, the special status of the noun is not stated but we would like to conjecture that it may stem from its subcategorisation for the feature [±human]. In 23 (a) *umalume* has the feature [+human] while the dogs participating with him in the hunting action have the feature [-human]. The flexibility of isiZulu is given ample testimony to when we examine 23 (b) in which *umkwekazi* and *izigebengu* are participating as conjoined nouns. Here, the two nouns take the concord of the noun nearest the auxiliary formation *–kona* which is a class 8 prefixal marker, **izi-**. This scenario is operative under what we will term Bosch Rule 5 which simply states that; "*Use the concord of the noun closest to the predicate*." In fact a whole analytical paper could be written on what we have termed the Bosch Rules alone vis-à-vis the behavior of conjoined nouns in isiZulu syntax. For instance the proliferation of Rules governing the concords of conjoined nouns which

number up to 8 is something that may require further scrutiny and study. There is also the overlapping of rules and in some cases the near-cancellation of a later Rule by an earlier one. Perhaps the Rules may need to be examined against provisions of the Person-Animacy Hierarchy (PAH). We will further elaborate and demonstrate the efficacy of PAH in the next section of this discussion.

Going back to the results accruing from the sample sentences in 22 to 27 as well as the results availed in Table 3, it would seem that Shona provides quite some interesting scenario with regard to the subject under discussion. As was witnessed with the other Bantu languages, all the conjoined nouns that mix or cross classes do not often necessarily control the concords of the classes from which either of the nouns used belong. They all tend to pick the concord of a different class. For instance, in 24 (a) two nouns - one from class 1 and the other from class 6, respectively *murume* and *mapere*, were seen to be controlling the concord of class 8, ***zvi-***. The ill-formed sentence 24 (b) strangely and evidently shows that the two nouns used in 24 (a) cannot take the agreement marker of either of the participating nouns. Although the sample provided for Shona is admittedly tiny, nevertheless, it is indeed true that *zvi-* can be taken as a default concordial agreement marker where many conjoined nouns tend to find ready and/or free accommodation. As can be seen with 25 (a), two proper nouns – Tichaona and Sarudzai can either take the class 2 or class 8 concordial agreement marker. In 26 (a) *n'ombe* which falls under class 10 and *madhongi* which occurs in class 6 are both controlling the agreement concord of class 8, a class to which neither of the two nouns belong. Owing to the high prevalence of the use of the concord of class 8 in Shona, there is need therefore to make a deeper examination of the nature of this particular phenomenon in terms of the lion's share of conjoined noun phrases that the class lays claim upon.

### 4.1.2 On class 8 *zvi-* as a default concord in Shona

Dembetembe (1981) who made an initial study of the syntax of conjoined nouns in Shona arrived at the following significant conclusion in regard to the use of the class 8 agreement marker. Writes Dembetembe (1981: 110-111)

> But when two or more subject noun phrases or object noun phrases which do not refer to human beings are conjoined the concord which they usually control together is [gender 8]… What is intriguing, though, is a conjoined structure which involves a human and a non-

> human noun phrase. If a choice of gender referring to the two noun phrases together has to be made, it will be that of [gender 8]

However, while we are highly indebted to Dembetembe (1981) for his early insight in regard to the predominant use of class 8 prefixal morpheme for most conjoined subject noun phrases unfortunately he does not attempt to proffer an explanation as to the cause of this propensity apart from compiling empirical evidence in support of his observations. By not advancing further explanation we conjecture that Dembetembe (1981) might have taken the obtaining condition as being some primitive architecture of language that would not yield its secrets to any further prodding. He does not say so but if that is the conclusion that he might have arrived at, we certainly do not share in his thinking since in our opinion there seems to be room for further probing. And further prodding into the cause of this agreement tendency is going to be the major preoccupation of this section.

A close examination of the data seem to suggest that for Shona, there is one basic rule governing conjoined noun phrases' concordial agreement. However for convenience's sake, we shall split the rule into two. Should there be any further rules governing the same, it seems to us that these two act as the axioms from which the rest derive. Listed below are the two proposed Rules:

**Conjoined NPs concordial agreement rules**

**Rule 1**
Human conjoined NPs will control the agreement of class 2 and class 8

**Rule 2**
Human and non-human conjoined NPs will control the agreement of class 8

If the 'two' Rules are correct, it seems then, by virtue of reference to humans and non-humans that is occurring in the formulation of the same, the dictates and provisions of the Person-Animacy Hierarchy (PAH), one way or the other, cannot therefore be left out of contention. PAH plays a crucial underlying role in ultimately determining the concordial agreement marker of conjoined noun phrases. PAH has cross-linguistically been seen to play an important role in determining especially the order of precedence of NPs in syntax. In brief elaboration of this fact, when humans and non-humans occur in the same

sentence for instance, PAH determines that human NPs be accorded higher status vis-à-vis their non-human counterparts. A cursory examination of some of the illustrative sentences used above will bear this fact out. There are many versions of PAH in the literature. Below is Hayman's (1995) version as quoted in Matambirofa (2000:78)

**The person-animacy hierarchy**

**1st pers.> 2nd pers.>3rd pers. Humans>3rd pers. Animal>3rd pers. Inanimate**

What can be read from the ordering above is that a member of the category that precedes the one to its right is greater in significance than the one that follows after it, starting with the First Person Human and cascading downwards so to 3rd Person Inanimate. The importance of this point also comes out in an unrelated examination of object symmetries in Runyambo by Rugemalira (1991:204) when he comments in respect of animacy as follows:

> The basic idea is that a participant in an event is conceived as either assuming either a human or a non-human role; and more generally, an animate or an inanimate role.

Following our claim that there is an intrinsic interrelationship between rules governing concordial agreement of conjoined nouns and provisions of PAH, in Figure 5 below an attempt is made to harmonise and draw a common denominator for these two critical precepts.

PAH and control of concordial agreement

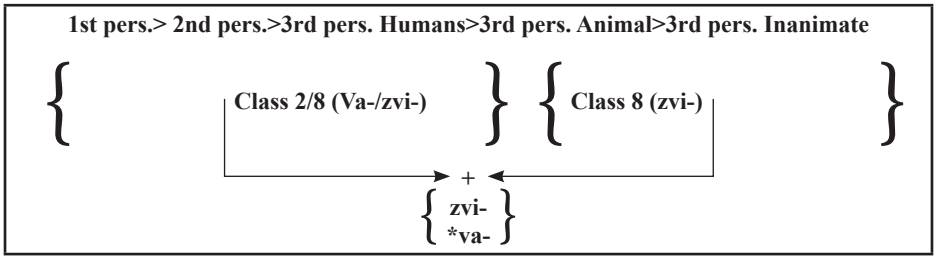



***Figure 5***

Figure 5 summarises in an iconic manner the following facts regarding how PAH and concordial agreement intersect – PAH bifurcates the nominal and/or referential universe fundamentally into human and non-human categories. The morphosyntactic universe on the other hand basically allocates the prefixal morphemes *va-* and *zvi-* respectively to conjoined human and non-human referents. The lower part of the diagram shows that when human and non-human conjoined nouns occur they take the prefixal concord of class 8 and never of class 2. The same facts accruing from the diagram can even in more simpler terms be represented as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| humanNP + humanNP | = | va-/zvi- |
| humanNP + non-humanNP | = | zvi- |
| non-humanNP + non-humanNP | = | zvi- |

As earlier suggested, our proposal still stands that class 8 provides a default prefixal agreement marker for all conjoined noun phrases. This is given further credence to by the fact that both human and non-human conjoined NPs can control the agreement concord of class 8. When scrutinized further, it would seem that class 8 behaves in this manner for some underlying reason that we would like to examine and delineate. The first and perhaps obvious observation that we would like to register as a springboard leading to some further analysis is that class 8 is the plural form of class 7 *chi-*. The special interest that we have in this particular class is that it houses the obscure but awkwardly important – 'nameless' - referent, ***chinhu* - thing.** The plural form of ***Chi-nhu*** is class 8 - ***Zvi-nhu*** – Things.

When we examine the human and non-human dichotomy as provided for by PAH in Figure 5 above, there seems then to be some underlying relationship between genders 1 and 7 in regard to the use of *va-* of class 2 for human conjoined nouns and the control of class 8 *zvi-* with respect to non-human conjoined nouns. Guthrie (1948:49) defines gender as being composed of '…definite sets of two or more prefixes with identical stems, which give rise to regular short series of words.' This kind of scenario gives rise to what he then terms two-class, one-class and multi-class genders. It is our submission that the nominal stem –***nhu*** is a hub for many classes and is therefore the right candidate for multi-class genders. It is also quite interesting to note that stem –**nhu** of all the 12 classes that it is compatible with, it takes only two plural prefixes for normal specimen - that of class 2 and class 8. The only other plural class that it takes is 13 but

it is the abode of secondary commentary nouns. These two plural classes, that is, 2 and 8 respectively represent the prototypically [+human] and [-human] dichotomy within the nominal system. An examination of these facts persuade us to think that there is no coincidence about this state of nominal division with regard to number and the subcategorisation of nouns for the feature [±human]. As earlier alluded to, it seems to be a fundamental subcategorisation aspect of the referential or objective cosmos.

An illustration of the multi-class gender nature of the stem *–nhu* is given in Table 4 below.

**Stem -nhu as a multi-class gender**

| **Class** | **Prefix** | **Noun** | **Gloss** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | mu- | mu-*nhu* | *person* |
| **2** | va- | va-*nhu* | *people* |
| **7** | chi- | chi-*nhu* | *thing* |
| **8** | zvi- | zvi-*nhu* | *things* |
| **11** | ru- | ru-*nhu* | *longish, ugly thing* |
| **12** | ka- | ka-*nhu* | *small thing* |
| **13** | twu- | twu-*nhu* | *small (?mass) things* |
| **14** | u- | u-*nhu* | *having good manners* |
| **16** | pa- | pa-*nhu* | *on a position* |
| **17** | ku- | ku-*nhu* | *place* |
| **19** | svi- | svi-*nhu* | *skinny, sickly thing* |
| **21** | zi- | zi-*nhu* | *big, ugly thing* |

**Table 4**

With respect to the results accruing from Table 4 above, it is quite telling for Shona which has a total of 20 active noun classes for the stem *–nhu* to be gobbling 12 classes – which account for more than half of the available classes. The high morpho-semantic compatibility of the stem seems to suggest the manner in which the nominal and/or referential cosmos of the Shona and perhaps on a wider scale, the Bantu in general was parceled out at some primordial and foundational stage. An expatiation of this observation to the extent that it sheds

light on the concordial behavior of conjoined noun phrases shall form our major preoccupation in the few paragraphs ahead of the current one.

In Figure 6 an attempt is made to schematize the relationship between class 2 and class 8. It should be borne in mind that the two classes in question are both plural in number and so we shall approach them as shown in Figure 6 via their singular counterparts.

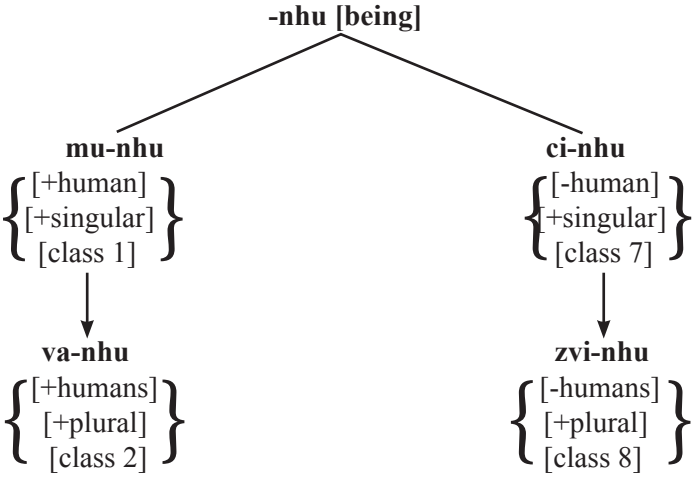



***Figure 6***

Deriving from the facts in Figure 6, we are of the view that there is further independently motivated evidence for viewing the use of *-zvi-* as fundamentally referring to non-human referents and/or entities. To this extent the prefixal morpheme *zvi-* is basically endowed with the features [-human] and [+plural]. Under this *-zvi-Condition* as we will call it, the morpheme *–zvi-* somewhat acts as a universal default object marker in discourse. The referent or object is however indeterminate and underspecified. It receives full specification under the full scope of the discourse in which it is used. Its deployment is somewhat associated with old information or at least some intuitively understood primordial referent. Owing to this collective competence in regard to its use there is a pervasive default reference to an obscure referent ***zvi-*** that occurs in disparate syntactic environments. Consider the sentences below:

**The –zvi-condition**

29 (a) **Zva**unoita ha-ndi-**zvi**-d-i
Rel-you do NEG-IstPers.-?zvi-like-FV
'I don't like what you do.'

(b) Wa-**zvi**-on-a here **zva**ndaona?
2Pers.-zvi-see-FV Interog. Rel-what I saw
'Did you see what I saw?'

(c) U-cha-**zvi**-rega chete
SM2Pers.-FTR-zvi-stop definite
'You will definitely stop it.'

(d) Baba va-zvi-tambir-a zvose
1a/Father SM1a-zvi-PAST-accept-FV all
'Father has accepted everything.'

(e) Mai va-ka-**zvi**-farir-a **zva**makavapa
1a/Mother SM1a-PST-zvi-like-FV zva-Rel
'Mother liked what you gave her.'

If the illustrations provided above are indicative of the often obscure and recalcitrant nature of ***zvi-***, we would first like to propose that it is not coincidental that conjoined noun phrases by virtue of being two or more in a construction are therefore already plural in number hence their controlling of the agreement marker of a plural class which is 8. It can also be observed from the above that ***–zvi*** is, depending on the syntactic environment, acting sometimes as a subject prefix and at times as an object prefix. In 29 (a) for instance ***–zvi*** is acting as a subject prefix while in 29 (b) it is an object marker. However for our strict purposes here, we are arguing that *zvi-* as a referential morpheme is both a primitive and default class for referents that can accept without any difficulties conjoined nouns by lending its prefixal marker to them.

However, the occurrence of humans in this class needs further qualification and explanation since the argument that is being advanced is that this class primarily is the abode of non-human nouns. It is true indeed as in 25 (a) above that conjoined human noun phrases can control this class' concordial agreement but there certainly is a qualification that goes with its enlistment vis-à-vis humans. Even Dembetembe (1981: 111) who to the best of our knowledge first examined

the notion of conjoining in Shona noted that 'Occasionally, however, conjoined noun phrases which refer to human beings may control together either [gender 2] or [gender 8] …' The cautionary reference to "occasionally" already alludes to the somewhat special circumstances under which this control by conjoined human noun phrases occur.

The basic fact that must not be missed in this observation is that it is not very common for human conjoined noun phrases to control the agreement marker of class 8 and this is why when this happens it comes as a special alternative to the employment of the class 2 *va-* concord. Our submission is that when conjoined human noun phrases control the agreement of class 8 there is an underlying commentary secondary association that goes with it. It would seem that there is some underlying personification and metaphorical extension of class 7/8 nouns *chikara/zvikara* – literally 'dangerous beast(s)'. The metaphor may be used with a sense of admiration and endearment and in the reverse, the same can be used with overtones of disdain and disparage. In respect of the illustration in 27 (a) for instance, we can incorporate *zvi-* and recast it with a positive and endearing undertone as follows:

30 Tichaona na-Sarudzai **zvi**-kara **zvi**-no-d-an-a
**1a**\Tichaona and-**1a**\Sarudzai **8**-buddies **8SM**-PRS-love-RECP-FV
'Tichaona and Sarudzai are buddies that love each other.'
'Tichaona and Sarudzai really love each other.'

Conjoined noun phrases do certainly provide a challenge for Bantu languages. This is given ample testimony to by Canonici (1995:12) who notes the following about them, 'When there are more than one subject or object, (**conjoined reference**), cliticization problems arise.' If Bantu languages can be conceived of as having been wrought in some linguistic foundry, one would be excused to think that the designers did not pay due attention to the architecture of conjoined noun phrases. Perhaps the successes that had been scored in respect of singular nouns mistakenly made them think that they could be extrapolated for conjoined noun phrases. It would seem then that the different languages were, so to speak, left to their own devices. This thinking is supported by the fact that the Bosch Rules for conjoined noun phrases as summarized by Canonici (1995:12-13) for isiZulu amount to a total of 8 in all whereas for Shona we have come up with one rule that we have for convenience purposes subdivided into two formulations.

**5 Concordial agreement of some non-Conjoined NPs**

We shall bring this exposition to a close by finally examining some noun phrases in Shona in an attempt to account for their unorthodox concordial behavior. Consider the illustrations provide below:

31 (a) **Muhana ma**ke ma-kanaka
**18**/9/heart **18**-his/her 18-good
'S/He is good at heart.'

(b) **Muhana ya**ke ma-kanaka
**18**/9/heart **9**-his/her 18-good
'S/He is good at heart.'

32 (a) **Pasi po**se **pa**-ka-bvum-a
**16**\earth **16**-all **16SM**-PST-agree-FV
'The whole world agreed.'

(b) **Pasi ro**se ra-ka-bvum-a
16\earth 5-all **5SM**-PST-agree-FV
'The whole world agreed.'

33 (a) **Jaya** mu-pfumi **ra**-i-da mu-kadzi
5/youngman **1**-rich person **5SM**-HBT-like-FV 1-wife
'The rich young man wanted a wife.'

(b) **Jaya mu-pfumi a**-i-d-a mu-kadzi
5/youngman **1**-rich person **1SM**-HBT-like-FV 1-wife
'The rich young man wanted a wife.'

The illustrations given in 31 to 33 provide a special case of yet other interesting cases that are associated with nominal agreement. Whereas earlier we were examining conjoined nouns that fitted in with the schema: *NP andNP*→, the examples above are different in that they arise out of the following formulation: *N +Qualifier*. Owing to the illustrations' somewhat different configurations and accounting contraints, it is best that we examine them one at a time in order to arrive at how they behave in regard to concordial agreement.

The structure in 31 has been selected for analysis owing to its unique head noun which incorporates the phenomenon of pre-prefixing or extra-prefixing. Extra-prefixing results in what may be viewed as a noun and a half owing to the fact that a prefix is morpho-lexically attached onto an already existing noun with a

pre-existing prefix of its own. This scenario brings to two or more the number of prefixes that the individual noun ends up carrying. Illustration 31 morpho-syntactically fits in with the schema in Figure 7 below.

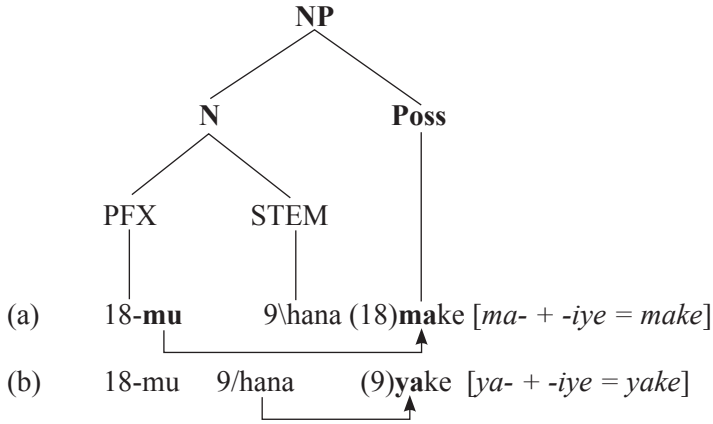



***Figure 7***

In Figure 7 above, there is a matrix head noun of class 18 - *muhana*, which, in terms of its constructional pattern, has an embedded noun *hana* of class 9 which functions as the stem of the same. The dissonance that arise out of this morphological nominal embedding demonstrate to some extent the syntax-morphology interface given the structures arising out of 31 (a) and (b). In 31 (a), the matrix noun *muhana* lends its concord to the qualifying possessive stem *–ke* to yield the possessive make as is shown above. However in 31 (b), the embedded, stem noun of class 9, *hana*, alternatively also copies its concordial agreement affix to the same possessive stem *–ke*, resulting in the full possessive *yake* which is associated with class 9. It is however true to say that 31 (b) might be lower on the acceptability scale vis-à-vis its rival in 31 (a). The question of acceptability, while it is not trivial is perhaps beside the point here because it ultimately is a function of taste and opinion both of which are open to wanton subjectivity. The point still remains that such extra-prefixed nouns are part of our languages' lexical baggage and they do indeed pose challenges that are associated with nominal agreement in syntax.

Illustration 32 has alternating quantitative affixes respectively, of classes 16 and 5 which pose concordial agreement challenges. The locative head noun in 32 (a)

lends the normal quantitative affix of class 16 to yield the qualifying quantitative - *pose*. The alternate structure represented by 32 (b) is most startling because the quantitative affix *r*- derives from a mysterious and unexpressed class 5 noun. Below is a diagrammatic representation of the structure in question.

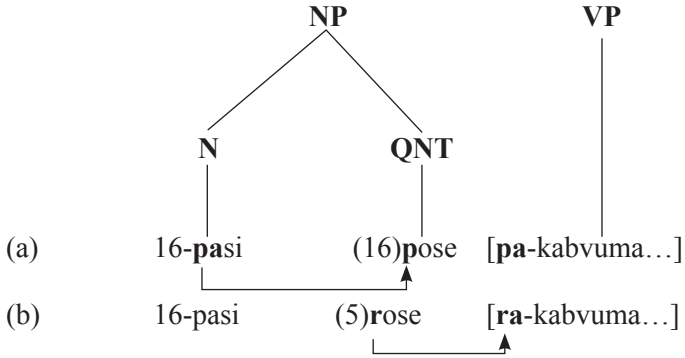



***Figure 8***

Perhaps the main point of presenting a case such as we have in 32 which has been diagrammatically captured in Figure 8 is to provide an unusual NP in which the head noun's prefix can be used in free variation with that of its qualifier. This kind of scenario poses challenges in terms of how to account for it. From a strict, canonic perspective, the structure in 32 (a) is the only one that must be obtaining under the rule where the subject of the clause has the prerogative to copy its prefixal marker on other parts of speech. This is the point that Mpofu (2009: 265) reiterates when she writes thus 'other parts of speech that modify the head noun … such as demonstratives, selectors, enumerative, etc. have to be in agreement with the head noun.' The quantitative – *rose* in structure 32(b) certainly is not in agreement with the locative head noun – *pasi*. Yet, quite strangely relatively many more speakers of the language prefer the structure in 32 (b) where the quantitative of class 5 seems to block and nullify the intuitively understood privilege of the subject locative *pasi* of class 16. What is even more intriguing is the fact that from the quantitative affix used in 32 (b) there seems to be an unexpressed, underlying class 5 noun that is interfering and usurping the authority of the locative head noun. We are currently not in a position to account for this difference between 32 (a) and 32 (b) both of which are grammatical and

acceptable. As far as we are aware, the difference is certainly not dialectal and this renders it all the more challenging to (re)solve.

The final illustrative structure that we will examine is shown in 33. It is composed of a subject noun phrase that comprises of two nouns – *jaya* and *mupfumi*. In this noun phrase, it is a given that jaya is the head noun while the other noun *mupfumi* is functioning as its modifier. What is, however, disconcerting about this particular construction is the ability of the modifying noun *mupfumi* to also copy its prefixal marker onto the verb phrase in alternation with the head noun - *jaya*. Figure 9 is a diagram schema in the order of Figures 7 and 8 above, showing the agreement alternation between the head noun and its NP modifier.

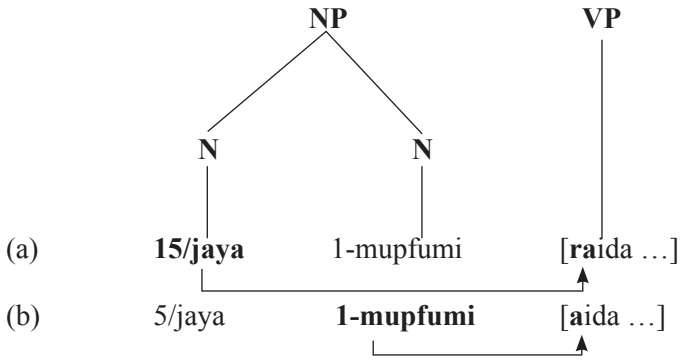



***Figure 9***

The structure in 33 (b) that is schematized in Fig. 9 above is inadmissible from the canonic and predominant view of nominal agreement marking as illustrated in section 2 of this paper. It is here inadmissible for the simple reason that a modifying noun is blocking the head noun from copying its prefixal marker onto the predicate complex. It seems to be taking advantage of being adjacent to the verb as if it is borrowing one of Bosch's Rules for Zulu which says, '*Use the concord of the noun closest to the predicate*.' in Canonici (1995: 12). However a rule such as this one which is virtually unconstrained by anything else except adjacency to the predicate is operationally problematic. But that is beside the point. For our current purposes, it is significant to mention the fact that both structures, that is, 33 (a) and (b) are grammatical and acceptable as alternative means of conveying the same information that each structure carries separately.

It is problematic to account for the occurrence of structures such as the ones that are represented in 31 to 33 with regard to their alternating prefixal agreement morphemes. All the structures are made up of a head noun and a qualifier. Structures 31 and 32 have what we can call typical qualifiers with the head noun in 31 being qualified by a possessive while the one in 32 is qualified by a quantitative. The noun phrase in 33 deviates from this norm in so far as it has a head noun and a fully fledged noun that qualifies it. In the end, the evidence at hand shows that each of the constructions being analyzed is unique in one form or another.

The NP in 31 is made up of a head noun which, in terms of its construction pattern, has a locative class affix of 18 and a stem that can stand as an independent noun of class 9 with a null prefixal morpheme. It is this nominal stem from where the alternative structure that is provided in 31 (b) arises. Here the noun stem usurps the prefixal agreement prerogative of the head noun in travesty of canonic concordial agreement conventions. In 32 (b) a class 16 noun is treated as a class 5 noun as evidenced by the quantitative affix ri- that is used. It would seem as if there is either a silent conversion of a class 16 into a class 5 noun or, on the alternative, there is some underlying and unexpressed class 5 noun looming somewhere unexpressed. The sudden leap from a class 16 affix to that of a class 5 one is difficult to account for under the circumstances.

## 6. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has examined a number of significant aspects that relate to nominal agreement in Bantu. Some crucial facts concerning the whole subject have been raised, revisited, confirmed, argued against and so forth. In section 2 of the discussion we have not only demonstrated but we have wholly conceded the fact that noun grammatical agreement is predominantly forward moving in sympathy with the SVO computation of Bantu languages' architecture. In section 3 we have further argued and demonstrated the occurrence of the *backward concordancing* phenomenon in Shona. The language, being the writer's mother tongue provided a fairly comfortable linguistic cosmos for the exploration of the main ideas of this presentation. It is our fervent hope that similar researches in other Bantu languages may be provoked by our submission in this discussion. It will be noted that we have departed in quite a radical way from viewing the object marker only as such and to this well known function we have added backward concordancing. The existence of this point is further strengthened

by the fact that the object marker does not change its agreement form and/or morpheme even if the same noun is turned into a subject through passivisation for instance. *Backward agreement* has been defined as the cataphoric ability of the noun to morphologically copy its prefixal form in a clause or sentence before it is actually encountered in the linear order of syntax. While there is need to further develop as well as fine-tune the argument being raise here, it has, however, been shown that *backward agreement* occurs under special conditions which we have collectively termed the *Backward Agreement* Condition (BAC). A number of constructions are overarched by this Condition and chief among them are modal-auxiliary verbs.

The second part of the paper has concerned itself chiefly with concordial agreement as it relates to conjoined and other such substantive constructions which respectively fall into the following schemata *NP andNP* and *NP +Qualifier*. What has been most intriguing are the many cases in which conjoined nouns control the agreement prefix of a class to which none of them belong. It has also been observed that different languages tend to avoid such NPs and instead split what would otherwise be the conjoined subject or object phrases. Studies of conjoined nouns in Zulu and Shona have been most revealing. In Zulu we have come across rules for conjoined nouns which we have referred to as the Bosch Rules. While the rules are quite helpful as a starting point, it has been noticed that they are not water-tight as a guide owing to the tendency for them to proliferate and run the danger of being ad hoc. For Shona, a single rule expressed in two related parts has been proposed. It has been argued that the Person-Animacy Hierarchy plays a part in terms of the class that conjoined noun phrases pick their controlling prefix from. Human noun phrases tend to control class 2 prefix *va-* while non-humans tend to control class 8 prefix *zvi*. When a noun phrase comprises both a human and a non-human it tends to control the class 8 affix and never any other. It has been argued that class 8 is the plural of the multi-class gender *–nhu* – thing. The proposal made is that *–nhu*, almost by default tends to accommodate all manner of referents and/or entities hence the predominant tendency for conjoined noun phrases to control the prefix of this class.

In section 5 we examined three pairs of sentences that have non-conjoined, noun phrases. Each of the pair of sentences from 31 to 33 make up a syntactic minimal pair. The said

NP have identical semantic content. They differ slightly only in terms of concordial agreement. The sentences are characterized by alternate concordancing of the head noun and its qualifier in the case of 32 and 33. The structure in 31 (a) and (b) is unique in the sense that the head noun is characterized by two prefixes. There is the locative head prefix *mu-* belonging to class 18 and the subordinate null (Ø) class 9 prefix both of which take turns, in the alternate structures (a) and (b) to lend their class affixes to the possessive qualifier. In this particular case the behavior of both the matrix and the embedded noun seem to corroborate Selkirk's (1983:59) argument about the syntax of words and in this case, prefixes. Writes Selkirk:

> … an affix is a lexical item; it is assigned a category and has a lexical entry, like any other unbound morpheme or morphologically complex item, be it a word, a stem, or whatever…. any idiosyncratic information associated with an affix is part of its lexical entry.

The issues relating to nominal agreement that we have touched upon and/or explored in this paper seem not have received adequate attention by both the pioneering as well as the latter day researchers of Bantu syntax. Some proposals have been proffered in the course of our examination of conjoined nominal structures' concordial agreement behavior. One is however left to speculate whether or not the challenges posed by such constructions might in the course of time have fallen into the cleavage that divides linguistic competence and linguistic performance. If at all such an argument were admissible in accounting for the challenge at hand, perhaps we would seize the opportunity and in elaboration suggest that the more acceptable structures in the case of alternating sentences are the ones that are sanctioned by our linguistic competence while the less acceptable ones proceed from long established performance errors that have sneaked and lodged themselves into some uneasy collective convention by speakers.

## Notes

1. The first version of this paper was presented as a plenary session paper during the 10th LASU Conference held at the National University of Lesotho on 27th November 2009. I benefited tremendously from comments and remarks that were made by the participants during the same. I thank

them all for their positive comments, remarks and criticism, some of which have been incorporated into the current version. I am grateful to the NUFU-funded CROBOL Project for availing to me funding that enabled me to participate in this important gathering. I am grateful, too, to the University of Zimbabwe that granted me Duty Leave to attend the same. To the Organizing Committee of the Conference, I say thank you for not only availing to me the opportunity to give a plenary presentation but also for the waiver of my registration fees. The opportunity to give the presentation at that 'exalted' level precipitated within me a more critical and careful approach to the entire research for which I am grateful.

2 Note that *mka* here and *kelya* in 9 (c) are may own addition to the initial sentence structures and do not represent the data provided by Bresnan and Moshi for Kichaga.

3. Note that in 9 (d) the double objects, *kelya* and *mka* do not represent Kichaga data as provided by Bresnan and Moshi. I have inserted them deliberately in order to correlate them with their respective object markers.

4. During the 10th LASU in Lesotho my attention was recently drawn by M. Machobane to the study of conjoined nouns in Zulu by Doke and Mofokeng. I still have to lay my hands in the said study.

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