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Expressing politeness and respect in Bantu languages: A short comparative survey

Lutz Marten

SOAS University of London

Lm5@soas.ac.uk

Nancy C. Kula

University of Essex

nckula@essex.ac.uk

1. Introduction

One of the key functions of language is to provide speakers and hearers with conceptual and semantic structures for interaction with the world around us. One of the central domains where this function is important is the structure of social relationships. Language is often used to define, assert, and negotiate the way people relate to each other, and many languages have specific structural means which can be exploited to establish or signal social relationships, express solidarity, politeness or respect.

The present contribution explores this topic with respect to Bantu languages. We will first develop a broad overview of different ways in which Bantu languages provide formal means for expressing politeness, respect, and social position, and then focus on two strategies which are based on the use of plural marking for singular reference and show the distribution of the two strategies across a sample of 33 Bantu languages. The study shows the richness of this area in Bantu languages, both in terms of the different structural (and lexical) means to express politeness and respect, and in terms of the crosslinguistic distribution of different strategies.

2. Politeness and social distinction in language

The use of language for the expression of social position and social distinctions is well documented (see Foley 1997: 307-343 for a concise overview). Brown and Gilman (1960) investigate the use of plural forms for singular reference in many European languages and coin the term T/V distinction for the use of two different forms of address: T forms are singular forms used in informal or familiar contexts (from the Latin 2nd person singular pronoun *tu*), while V forms (from the Latin 2nd person plural pronoun *vos*) are plural forms and used in formal or polite contexts. The use of the two different forms has often been linked to social rank, where a socially higher speaker would address a socially lower speaker with a T form, but would expect to be addressed by a V form, thus marking the asymmetry in the social relationship. Another dimension related to the use of the forms is solidarity. For example, when two speakers use the more familiar T form, they may do so to confirm that they are construing their relation as equal in terms of social hierarchy, and that they share a high level of solidarity due to, for example, shared age, profession, outlook or life experience.

In addition to the T/V distinction, there are several other means of marking social relationships (Foley 1997). In English, which does not have a formal T/V distinction, the use of names (first name, last name), titles and nicknames can be used to indicate different levels of formality, politeness and solidarity. Another well-known phenomenon is the use of honorifics, for example in East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean, which also affects verbal inflection and agreement systems. A particular striking example of the use of honorifics is found in Javanese, where different speech styles based on the social relations of participants and referents permeate the lexical and grammatical system.

Politeness can be expressed morphologically as well as lexically. In terms of vocabulary, individual words may be associated with a particular social meaning – for example, in greetings – or a whole set of words may be seen as appropriate or inappropriate for particular situations, leading to differences in register. The latter case is indicative of the expression of politeness towards the discourse situation. In other contexts, politeness is expressed towards the addressee, for example through the use of particular forms of address or V forms of pronouns. A third context is the expression of politeness towards the referent of an expression, for example, by using an indirect form of reference.

3. Strategies of politeness marking in Bantu languages

Bantu languages have a rich array of marking politeness, with some strategies found widely across the family, and others being more restricted. Examples of lexical forms associated with social distinctions, politeness and respect include the use of honorific titles and specific forms of greetings. Morphological distinctions are often closely linked to the noun class and agreement system, for example the use of class 2 or class 2b for honorific usage, or the use of 2nd person plural pronominal and agreement forms for singular reference. In verbal morphology there are specific forms of request and commands which are associated with politeness, often (historically) related to locative morphology. Striking examples of the expression of politeness through the use of specific registers is the use of so-called avoidance languages such as *hlonipa* in Southern Africa.

3.1. Honorific titles and greetings

There are many honorific titles in Bantu languages, reflecting the different ways in which social relations in the speech communities are structured and valued. Some examples are provided in (1).

(1)   Honorific titles in different Bantu languages

a.	Mzee	Swahili respectful form of address for a male elder
b.	Bamudala	Bemba respectful form of address for a male elder
c.	Banakulu (bantu)	Bemba respectful form for a female elder (lit. 'grandmother of people')
d.	Bashikulu (bantu)	Corresponding male form (lit. 'grandfather of people')
e.	BanaBwalya	Bemba respectful form for a woman ('mother of Bwalya')
f.	BashiBwalya	Corresponding male form
g.	Rra	Tswana 'father', address form for a male addresse
h.	Mma	Tswana 'mother', address form for a female addresse

i.	Ndugu	Swahili 'brother', polite form of address
j.	Nkosi	Zulu honorific for royalty

The examples from Swahili (G42), Bemba (M42), Tswana (S31) and Zulu (S42) show some of the variety of honorific titles in Bantu languages. Respect forms exist in relation to different social parameters. Examples from Swahili (1a) and Bemba (1b-d) show the importance of age, with forms like *mzee* and *banakulu bantu* being used to express respect for older people.[1] Like age, parenthood is accorded respect as seen in examples from Bemba (1e-f) and Tswana (1g-h). The Bemba forms are built on the name of the offspring and so the structure is 'mother of X'/'father of X'. The Tswana examples *rra* and *mma* show that the words for 'father' and 'mother' have been extended to serve as polite address forms for males and females in general. Similar forms are found in a number of Bantu languages. The Swahili form *ndugu* (1i) has similarly been extended from meaning 'brother, sibling' to being used as a general form of polite address. A different example is provided in (1j) where *inkosi*, the word for 'king, ruler' can also be used as a term for addressing royalty.

Greetings are another domain where social distinctions can be expressed in different ways, as the examples from Swahili and Bemba show.

(2)   Greeting formulas in Swahili and Bemba

a. Shikamoo	Swahili respectful greeting to an elder person; cf. *shika* 'touch, hold' and *moo* (< *miguu* 'feet, legs'), lit. 'I hold your feet' (Johnson 1939: s.v. shika).
Marahaba	Reply to *shikamoo* (< Arabic)
b. Muli shani?	Bemba respect (2nd plural) greeting, 'how are you?'
Ndifye bwino	Reply to *muli shani*, 'I am well'.

The Swahili greetings in (2a) are asymmetrical, lexicalising a difference in age: *Shikamoo* is a respectful greeting offered to older people or those of

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[1] *Banakulu* in Bemba means 'grandmother' and can be used in 'grandmother of X' expressions as with parents in (1e-f), in e.g. *Banakulu Bwalya*. The addition of *bantu* to this form in (1c-d) suggests unfamiliarity with the referent and in this sense even more clearly denotes a respect form for an unknown elderly person.

higher status or social position, to which the addressee replies *Marahaba* (a loanword from Arabic, where it is a neutral, symmetric greeting). The forms carry both politeness (as opposed to less formal greetings such as *habari yako*, lit. 'your news?' or *hujambo* 'how are you?') as well as (typically age-based) respect. The Bemba greetings in (2b) are symmetrical – both participants use the same forms – but encode respect through the use of 2nd person plural morphology when referring to a single addressee, a V-form in terms of the T/V distinction. Variations of the forms can be used to remove the respect element – the shortened form *Shani?* (lit. 'how') serves as a colloquial greeting without any marking of respect, and the 2nd person singular form *Uli shani?* can be used by older speakers for addressing younger speakers, typically children. We will discuss forms like these in more detail in the following sections.

3.2 Plural forms with singular reference

The main morphological means of encoding respect and politeness in many Bantu languages is associated with the noun class and agreement system. Two different systems can be distinguished in this respect. The first is the use of class 2 morphology when referring to or addressing singular referents (cf. Maho 1999: 93), where class 2 marking can be found on the noun as well as in the relevant agreement morphology. The second system is the use of 2nd person plural marking when addressing a singular addressee – the Bemba greeting *muli shani* seen in (2b), above, employs this strategy, as the subject marker *mu-* is a 2nd person plural form, but can be used for singular reference (addressing one hearer). Both systems are instances of the T/V distinction discussed above, where plural forms are used to address or refer to singular referents in order to convey politeness or respect.

Examples of the first strategy, class 2 noun class marking can also be found in Bemba:

(3) a. Mutale   a-mweene   Bupe
        1.Mutale   SM1-see.PERF   1.Bupe
        'Mutale saw Bupe'

     b. Ba-Mutale ba-mweene   Bupe
        2-Mutale   SM2-see.PERF   1.Bupe
        'Mutale saw Bupe'

    c. Ba-namayo ba-mweene   Mutale
       2-woman   SM2-see.PERF   1.Mutale
       'The woman saw Mutale' or 'The women saw Mutale'

In (3a), both names, *Mutale* and *Bupe*, are used in their plain form, without encoding respect. The forms would be appropriate in a context where both Mutale and Bupe are young, are familiar to the speaker, or are used in an informal, familiar setting. In contrast in (3b), the class 2 respect form *BaMutale* is used, implying that Mutale is an older or more respected person. In addition to the noun class marking, also the agreement morphology changes. In (3a) the subject marker on the verb is class 1 *a-*, while in (3b) it is class 2 *ba-*, agreeing with the class 2 noun *BaMutale*. The final example *banamayo* (3c) shows that for common nouns like *namayo* 'woman' (itself a derived form), the class 2 forms are ambiguous between a polite form with singular reference and a plural form (for which no politeness distinction is available).

The second morphosyntactic strategy found in Bantu languages to express politeness is the use of 2nd person plural forms for addressing singular addressees. In Cuwabo (P34), for example, Guérois (2015: 284) notes that this use is a 'sign of respect or polite attitude' towards the addressee. In (4), the speaker addresses an older man, using the 2nd person plural subject marker *mu-*:

(4)   mu-ní-zíwá   dháaví   wíílá   míyó   ddi-li
      SM2RESP-IPFV.CJ-know how   COMP 1SG.PRO   SM1SG-be
      maríya
      maria
      'How do you know I am Maria?' (Cuwabo, Guérois 2015: 284)

A similar structure is found in Bende (F12), where the 2nd person plural subject marker can be used to address a single person.

(5)   mw-a-lál-a   mpolá,   bha-kulú?
      SM2PL-PST-sleep-FV   peaceful   2-elder
      'How are you, the respected madam?' (Bende, Abe 2019: 204)

The example shows both the use of 2nd person plural agreement marking, as well as the use of class 2 noun class marking on the formal address term

bhakulu 'female elder' (the corresponding term for 'male elder' being *bhájango*).

A particular instance of the use of 2nd person plural marking to express respect and politeness is the wide-spread 'plural addressee marker' *-ini/-eni* (Meeussen 1967, Nurse 2008, Mkochi 2019). Historically related to a 2nd person plural pronoun, the form has developed into a verbal suffix used when addressing plural addressees, typically with infinitives. However, in many languages, the form can also be used when addressing only a single addressee, to mark politeness and respect.[2]

(6) a. Ikal-a
       sit-FV
       'Sit!'

     b. Ikal-e-ni
        sit-FV-PLA
        'Sit!' (to several people or as a polite form to one addressee)
     (Bemba M42, Kula and Marten, fieldnotes)

In Bemba and other languages, the use of the plural addressee marker can be combined with other forms of politeness marking, as we show with respect to Makhuwa in (8), below.

In Makhuwa (P31), there are two different 2nd person singular pronouns, one for informal use and one 'to express respect for older people or people higher in social ranking' (van der Wal 2009: 64). The set of Makhuwa short and long pronouns is given in (7).

(7) Makhuwa personal pronouns (van der Wal 2009: 64)

		Short form	Long form
SG	1	mi	miyaano
	2	we	weyaano
	2RESP	nyu	nyuwaano
	3	yena	

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[2] We remain agnostic as the exact morphological analysis of *-(i)ni*. In (6) we assume that the suffix is *-ni* and harmonises the final vowel, but an alternative analysis in which *-eni* is the suffix in the final position is also possible (see Mkochi 2019 for discussion).

PL	1	hĩ	hiyaano
	2	nyutse	nyuwaanotse
	3	ayenatse	

The form and distribution of the pronouns are instructive. Based on internal and comparative evidence it is likely that the 2nd person singular 'plain' form *we* is historically older, and that the respect form *nyu* is a historical plural form – hence an instance of using 2nd person plural forms for singular reference. We can then imagine that over time the honorific use became the dominant use, and the plural reference became opaque. New forms would then have developed for 2nd person plural – these were formed from the original forms plus *-tse* at the end, the latter probably in analogy to the *-tse* ending of the 3rd plural form *ayenatse* (cf. singular *yena*). The use of the respect form, together with plural marking of the verb, can be seen in (8), used when addressing a single referent.

(8)   ki-ná-múú-vékelá-ní   (nyú)
      SM1SG-PRES.DJ-OM2PL-beg-PLA   (2SG.RESP)
      'I beg you' (Makhuwa, van der Wal 2009: 87)

In (8), there are three (historic) plural markers – the 2nd person plural object marker *muu-*, the plural addressee marker *-ni* and the (former plural) respect pronoun *nyu*.

We will look in more detail at the distribution of these two morphological strategies across the Bantu area in Section 4.

There is interesting variation in the use of these strategies, which we can only touch upon here – a more detailed study of individual languages or comparatively would seem extremely rewarding.

In Chichewa (N31), according to Bentley and Kulemeka (2001:14), plural forms are used as 'markers of respect and politeness', while singular forms are 'reserved for friends, children, and socially inferior people'. From this description it appears that the Chichewa system is based on both the dimensions of solidarity and social hierarchy, which are also relevant for the use of European T/V systems.

In Zulu, the use of plural morphology for honorific meaning is, according to Poulos and Msimang (1998: 229), 'no longer common', and typically simply class 1 agreement is used, while passive constructions can be employed to show respect. However, Poulos and Msimang (1998) note that

plural morphology for singular referents can still be found in some dialects (e.g. in Transvaal Zulu), as well as in greetings.

In Yao (P21), the use of 2nd person singular forms is much more restricted. According to Sanderson (1922), it is 'only used idiomatically' and 'never used with the meaning of "thou", "thee", except in speaking to children, or when it is intended to express contempt or disparagement.' (1922:37). Similarly, Whiteley (1966: 57) notes that the use of the 2nd person singular subject marker is 'restricted in use to addressing children'. On the other hand, 3rd person forms, both singular and plural, can be used to refer to singular referents instead of 2nd person forms, to imply respect. This shift of reference and the use of 3rd person forms for *uchimbechimbe* ('politeness', Sanderson 1922: 116) has led to an interesting development in the formation of class 2 nouns, for which there are now two different forms, the historic class 2 plural form with an *a-* class 2 prefix, which is now being used as a polite singular, and a new form being used for plural based on a prefix *acha-*.

(9) a. mlendo   'stranger'   alendo (polite singular)   achalendo (pl.)
     b. mlumbu 'brother, sister' alumbu (polite singular)   achalumbu (pl.)
     c. singano 'needle'   achasingano (pl.)
     (Yao, Sanderson 1922: 22)

The historic class prefixes were *m-* for class 1 and *a-* for class 2. However, we can assume that with the increased use of class 2 for singular referents, the plural meaning became obscured, and over time new plural forms developed, making use of the formative *(a)cha-* which might be related to the agentive prefix *ka-* found in some Bantu languages. The pattern can be seen in (9a) and (9b), where *mlendo* and *mlumbu* have two class 2 forms each. In contrast, *singano* 'needle' in (9c) has only one plural form – the historically newer one – presumably as there is no need to form a polite singular version for 'needle'.[3]

3.3 Locative marking

While the use of 2nd person plural morphology for expressing politeness, as discussed in the preceding section, is cross-linguistically well described and familiar from the European T/V systems, the use of locative clitics for the

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[3] The system is in fact more complicated, as there are also forms with a *ŵa-* prefix, as well as a number of irregular forms. This may well be a reflex of the restructuring of the system.

expression of politeness is less well attested typologically. Yet the strategy is found in a number of Bantu languages (cf. Persohn and Devos 2017).

In Bemba, the class 17 locative clitic *-kó* has developed a number of grammaticalized functions, including the use as a marker of politeness.

(10) a.　M-péél-é-ní
　　　　OM1SG-give-FV-PLA
　　　　'Give (you all) me!'

　　b.　M-péél-é-ni=kó
　　　　OM1SG-give-FV-PLA=LC17
　　　　'Give (you all) me, please'
　　　　(Bemba M42, Marten and Kula 2014: 30)

In (10b) *-kó* functions as an indirectness/politeness marker, turning the imperative into a polite request. A similar usage of locative marking is found in Ruwund (L53):

(11)　　ng-inkáá=p　　　má-kónd
　　　　OM1SG-give.IMP=16　6-banana
　　　　'Please, give me bananas'
　　　　(Ruwund, Nash 1992: 973, cf. Devos and van der Auwera 2013)

In (11), the use of the locative clitic *-p* – class 16 rather than class 17 as found in Bemba – results in adding politeness to the imperative verb form.

The use of locative morphology for expressing politeness may be related to abstract, metaphorical or social space. A similar idea has been proposed by Marten and Kula (2014) to explain the use of locative morphology in substitutive applicatives ('doing something on behalf of someone'), where, according to that analysis, the locative introduces a social space of obligation which the applied object moves into. In the uses discussed here, related to politeness, the use of social space might similarly be applicable. Introducing social space through locative marking as in (10b) and (11) may give rise to a notion of distance and so afford the addressee more social space, which is interpreted as a sign of respect. Further empirical and conceptual work on the use of locative morphology for politeness marking might reveal more details about this construction type.

3.5 Politeness marking in language contact

A final aspect of politeness marking in Bantu discussed here is the persistence of politeness marking in language contact situations. Bantu languages are well known for the long history of language contact between them, and the different convergence effects arising from the contact (cf. Batibo 2002). In this section we look at two cases of language contact and how politeness marking was affected by this.

Lozi (K21, S34) is a well-known example of the complex language contact history of many Bantu languages. The language combines features from Southern Sotho (S33) and Luyana (K31), in addition to lesser influence from a number of other Southern African Bantu languages (cf. Gowlett 1989, Mbeha 2018). In the noun class system, a number of features have been adapted or re-introduced due to contact influence. For example, the Lozi class 2b marker *bo-* comes from Sotho *bo-* rather than from Luyana *a-*. With respect to politeness marking, Mbeha (2018) observes that while class 2 in Sotho marks plurality, it is also used to mark politeness in Lozi, which is a semantic feature taken from Luyana.

(12) bo-Lungu   ba-apeh-el-a   ba-eñi   li-tapi
      2b-Lungu   SM2-cook-APPL-FV   2-guests 10-fish
      'Mr Lungu is cooking fish for the guests' (Lozi, Marten et al. 2007: 313)

The example in (12) shows the use of class 2 morphology – the class 2b noun class prefix *bo-* and the class 2 subject marker *ba-* – used for reference to a single person. While the morphological form of the class 2b prefix comes from Sotho, the semantic use of politeness marking is due to influence from Luyana.

A second example of politeness marking in contact situations comes from a slightly different context, namely from the urban youth language Tsotsitaal. Urban youth languages are found across many African urban centres and are often characterised by drawing on a range of linguistic resources from the multilingual environments in which they are used, as well as by highly dynamic and creative language use. Youth languages are constantly evolving and serve as in-group language of young urban speakers who often also share cultural, social and economic outlooks and attitudes. Tsotsitaal is a well-established urban youth language of South Africa, drawing on a range of South African Bantu and non-Bantu languages. An example of politeness marking in Tsotsitaal is given in (13).

(13)   Ba-ou   lady
        2-old   lady
        'An old lady' (Tsotsitaal, Ditsele 2015)

The example shows the use of Bantu class 2 noun class morphology prefixed to a form from Afrikaans (*ou* 'old') which in turn modifies the English form *lady*. The example shows well the multilingual influences on Tsotsitaal, and is interesting in terms of the morphosyntax of the phrase: The adjective precedes the noun, in accordance with typical European (Afrikaans, English) syntax, but in contrast to typical Bantu syntax, where the adjective follows the noun. Furthermore, the noun class prefix is only found on the adjective, so either class is only marked on the dependent, but not on the head in this example, or *ou lady* is taken as one compound noun. The former analysis might receive support from the fact that class 2a nouns are often unmarked, and so the absence of noun class morphology on *lady* might be explained by saying that the noun is treated like a class 2a noun. In any case, what is interesting in view of the present discussion is that Bantu politeness marking by using class 2 morphology for single referents has been adopted in Tsotsitaal. Youth languages like Tsotsitaal are often seen as being non-standard and impoverished varieties, associated with low status and prestige. Yet this example shows that Tsotsitaal employs formal strategies for expressing social distinctions and according respect in the same way used by many Bantu languages with higher prestige (and indeed by many languages across the world).

4. Cross-linguistic distribution of plural strategies

In the previous section we have surveyed some formal strategies available in Bantu languages for structuring social relationships and for expressing politeness and respect. In this section, we focus on one of the two morphological strategies described in Section 3.2, the use of plural forms for singular reference. Based on a sample of 33 Bantu languages, we investigate the distribution of the two different plural-based politeness strategies discussed above, namely the use of class 2 morphology and the use of 2nd person plural morphology for reference to singular referents/addressees. The study is based on the wider study of comparative morphosyntax of Bantu languages and the parameters of variation developed in Guérois et al. (2017) – the parameter we use here is Parameter 063 in their list – as well as on the Bantu Morphosyntactic Variation database (BMV) (Marten et al. 2018), from which the data we use here are drawn.

With respect to the distribution of the honorific use of plural forms, Maho (1999: 93) notes that for most Bantu languages of his sample, 'grammar descriptions make no mention of honorific use of class 2', although he notes that this does not mean that the phenomenon does not exist in those languages. Still, Maho proposes that the associative plural meaning of class 2 morphology (e.g. 'father and company') is more widespread than respect or politeness marking. Guérois (2015) notes that the use of 2nd person plural forms for addressing single individuals 'is very widespread among the languages spoken in south Tanzania and north Mozambique, and undoubtedly constitutes an areal phenomenon' (Guérois 2015: 284). Our own data show that in our sample, both strategies are comparatively well attested.

The relevant data are based on the parameter shown in (14). Like all parameters in Guérois et al. (2017), this parameter (Parameter 63) is formulated as a question and then offers a range of answers. In this case, the question is 'Can plural persons be used to express a honorific singular?' and the answers include 'no', 2nd person plural marking, class 2 marking, or both 2nd person plural and class 2 marking.

(14) P063. Honorific plural: Can plural persons be used to express an honorific singular?

N/A	There is no subject marking on the verb
No	
1	Yes, 2nd person plural
2	Yes, class 2
3	Yes, both 1 and 2 are possible

Based on Marten et al.'s (2018) database, we have data for 33 Bantu languages for this parameter, although unfortunately all of them come from the Eastern, Central and Southern areas of the Bantu-speaking area or, in terms of Guthrie (1967-71) zones, from zones E, F, G, H, JD, JE, K, L, M, N, P, R and S. One language from zone B is included – Nzadi B865 – but there the question is not applicable as there is no subject marking. This means that the northwest of the Bantu area is not represented in the sample.

The distribution of the different strategies is shown in Table 1. It shows that more than half of the languages of the sample (54%) employ at least one of the strategies to mark honorific meaning (values 1-3). The most common strategy is the use of 2nd person plural marking (value 1) (30%), while only two languages of the sample (6%) make use of class 2 morphology only

(value 2). Both strategies (value 3) are used by 18% of the languages of the sample.

Value	Description	Languages (33)	Percent (100%)
-1	N/A, there is no subject marking on the verb	1	3%
0	No	14	42%
1	Yes, 2nd person plural	10	30%
2	Yes, class 2	2	6%
3	Yes, both 1 and 2 are possible	6	18%

Table 1: Distribution of the use of plural morphology for honorific marking

The values for each language of the sample are provided in Table 2. The languages are arranged alphabetically by Guthrie code, and so to some extent mirror geographic distribution. In this context it is worth noting that most '0' values are found in the top half of the table, showing that the use of the honorific strategies is more prominent in the south. A more detailed representation of the distribution of the different values can be seen in Map 1.

Language	Name	Value	Description
B865	Nzadi	-1	n/a: there is no subject marking on the verb
E35	Nyolo	0	no:
E51	Gikuyu	0	no:
E622d	Uru	0	no:
E623	Rombo	0	no:
E73	Digo	0	no:
F12	Bende	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker

F33	Rangi	0	no:
G22	Chasu	3	3: both 1 and 2 are attested
G221KK	Mbugu KK	0	no:
G221KN	Mbugu KN	0	no:
G42	Swahili	0	no:
G52	Chindamba	0	no:
H21	Kimbundu	0	no:
JD61	Kinyarwanda	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
JE11	Nyoro	0	no:
JE15	Ganda	2	2: class 2 morphology
K11	Cokwe	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
K333	Thimbukushu	3	3: both 1 and 2 are attested
L41	Kaonde	2	2: class 2 morphology
M42	Bemba	3	3: both 1 and 2 are attested
M54	Lamba	3	3: both 1 and 2 are attested
N13	Matengo	3	3: both 1 and 2 are attested
N31	Cewa	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
N44	Sena	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
P21	Yao	3	3: both 1 and 2 are attested
P31	Makhuwa	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
P34	Cuwabo	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
R11	Umbundu	0	no:
R41	Yeyi	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker

S31	Tswana	0	no:
S42	Zulu	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker
S54	Ronga	1	1: 2nd person plural subject marker

Table 2: Use of plural morphology for honorific marking in 33 Bantu languages

Map 1 shows the distribution of the different strategies in geographical space. As can be seen from the map, languages of the southern and central areas typically have honorific marking strategies – the exceptions being Tswana (S31) in the south, and Umbundu (R11) and Kimbundu (H21) in the west. In contrast, the majority of languages without honorific marking are found in the northeast, where 11 out of 16 languages do not employ either of the two strategies. The distribution of the languages of our sample thus confirms the impression in Guérois (2015) that honorific marking with plural morphology is common in the Southeast.
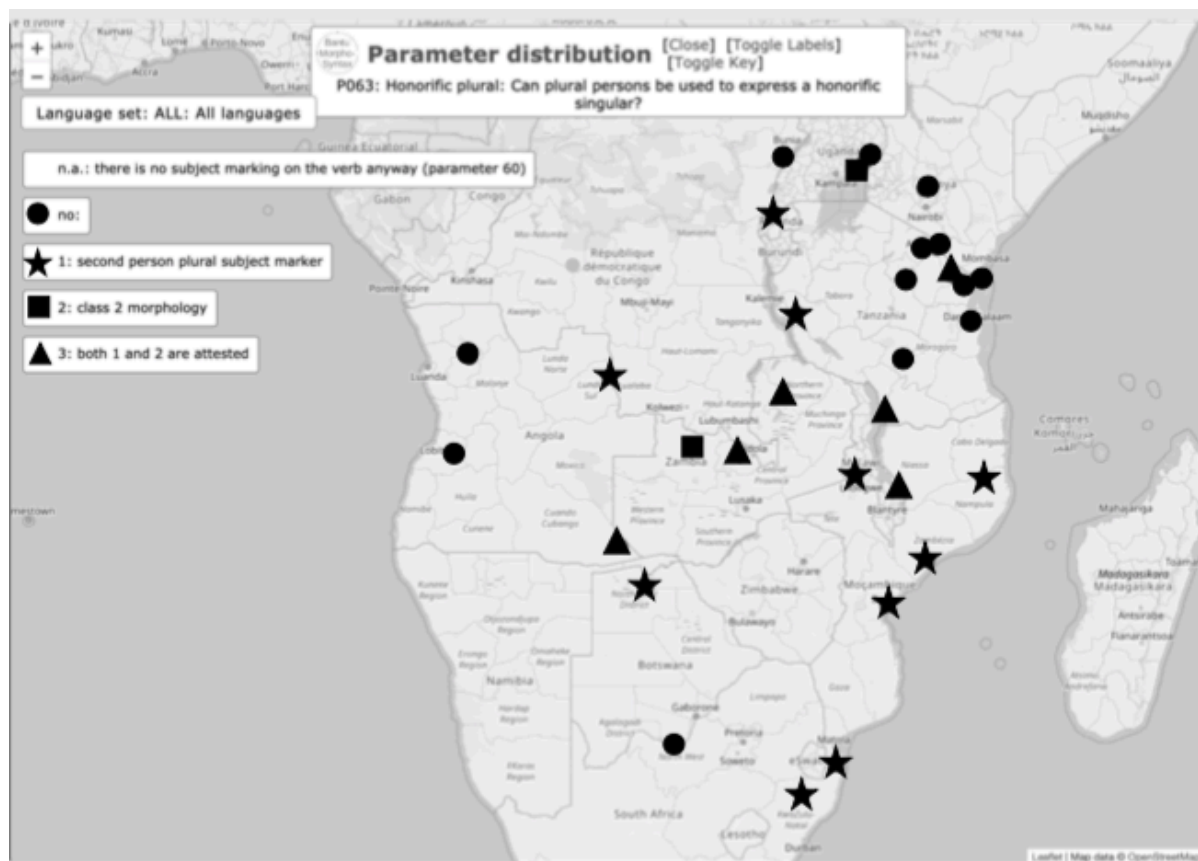
Map 1: Geographic distribution of the use of plural morphology for honorific marking

In terms of which of the two strategies are used, a potentially interesting northern-southern split emerges, although not very clearly. In the southeast, where honorific marking is most common, the dominant strategy is the use of 2nd person plural morphology (indicated by a star in Map 1). In contrast, further north, in the central and northeastern areas, a more diverse picture emerges, where the use of 2nd person plural morphology, class 2 morphology and the use of both strategies are all attested more evenly. If this pattern can be confirmed by more evidence, it might point to a situation where the use of 2nd person plural morphology is an areal innovation of much of the southeast and centre, and then the use of class 2 morphology is a subsequent innovation only extending to the central languages. This would point to a discourse-based innovation of the strategies, where honorific forms used for addressees precede the use of honorific forms used for reference to non-participants and as terms of address.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have presented a short overview of different strategies of honorific and politeness marking in Bantu languages. We have shown that there are numerous formal means found in different Bantu languages which speakers can use to express and negotiate social distance, politeness and respect. Some of these strategies are lexicalised and found, for example, in titles and address terms as well as in greetings. The main strategies among the morphosyntactic means of honorific marking are based on the use of plural morphology for singular referents, either by employing 2nd person plural morphology or class 2 morphology. These strategies are reminiscent of T/V systems familiar from European languages. A cross-linguistically less well documented strategy, but one which is found in different Bantu languages, is the use of locative morphology, such as post-verbal locative clitics, to express politeness. We have proposed that this use involves a process of grammaticalization and that the underlying semantics makes use of an abstract notion of social space and social distance. We have also looked at honorific marking in language contact situations and discussed examples of honorific marking found in Lozi and Tsotsitaal.

A second aim of the paper was to investigate the distribution of the two wide-spread morphosyntactic strategies of honorific marking through the use of plural morphology. Based on the parameters of Guérois et al. (2017) and the data in the Bantu Morphosyntactic Variation database (Marten et al. 2018) we looked at a sample of 33 Bantu languages from the central and southeastern Bantu-speaking areas. The results of the study showed that more than half of the languages in our sample use plural morphology for honorific marking, and of those, the majority use 2nd person plural morphology. Based on the geographic distribution of the different strategies we have tentatively proposed that plural honorific marking is an areal feature of the central and southern areas, with a subsequent innovation to also use class 2 morphology. The northeast was peripheral to these two innovations and today has the highest number of languages which do not use plural morphology for honorific marking.

Results of our study show the rich inventory of formal means found in Bantu languages for the expression of politeness and respect, and the amount of microvariation found in this domain. The study thus shows that this is a fruitful field of enquiry and a rewarding topic for further research. While our paper has outlined some of the features of honorific and politeness marking in Bantu languages, more detailed descriptive and comparative studies of the formal lexical and grammatical means used to express politeness are needed, as well as studies of the use of these forms and of how speakers and hearers employ linguistic means to explore and

negotiate social spaces in actual discourse, which was a topic we could not address at all in this short paper.

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