

PLURAL GENDER

Behavioral evidence for plural as a value of Cushitic gender with reference to Konso

This dissertation presents a psycholinguistic study on the processing of gender and number in Konso, a Cushitic language of Ethiopia, in which there appears to be a third value for gender besides masculine and feminine. This property has given rise to two competing analyses of this third class: as a gender (a plural gender) similar to masculine and feminine, or as a number similar to *pluralia tantum* in many languages. The dissertation aims to investigate the psychological reality of the plural class as realized on definite markers and verbal inflections in Konso. Series of picture-word experiments compared the processing of the plural class with the processing of masculine and feminine genders. Overall, the results of the experiments demonstrate that the nouns in the plural class are processed in the same way as the masculine and feminine gender nouns. This provides evidence for the analysis of the plural class as a value of gender and not number in the language. The dissertation also provides evidence that bound gender-marked morphemes are selected competitively as shown by the data from simple-picture naming task during bound morpheme naming in Konso. The dissertation extends the psycholinguistic investigation of gender beyond Indo-European languages and introduces psycholinguistic approaches into the study of Cushitic gender and number in fieldwork settings, outside the standard laboratories.

The dissertation will be of interest to specialists in Cushitic languages, in the psycholinguistics of gender, and in gender and number typology. It will be an important base for fieldworkers who would like to conduct field-based psycholinguistic work.

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Netherlands
Graduate
School of
Linguistics

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Mulugeta Tarekegne Tsegaye

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Landelijke Onderzoekschool Taalwetenschap