The Linguistics Morphological Conundrum of Prefix (um-): Noun Class 1 and Noun Class 3(um-): PGCE isiXhosa Students as Non-Mother Tongue

Anele Gobodwana[1*]

[1] *College of Human Sciences, Department of African Languages, University of South Africa, Preller Street, Pretoria 0801, South Africa, aneleandza@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6579-7044*

*Corresponding Author: aneleandza@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study examines the confusion or linguistic distortion between the noun class 1 and the noun class 3 prefixes on the isiXhosa noun class table, where both classes begin with the prefix um-. The morphological approach in word development confuses non-isiXhosa student speakers. This challenge and confusion are embedded in the lesson experience when teaching the noun classes ("umfundisi," which is a noun class 1, and "umlambo," which is a noun class 3). The non-isiXhosa students raised this as a problem, citing confusion between the two nouns that do not belong to the same class. In addition, the question was, "Why not come from the same class?" Therefore, this article will demonstrate, highlight, and address the ongoing confusion in linguistics' morphological repertoire, adopting the morphology theory (Aspect of Morphological Theory) to explain and clarify the differences between these two classes. The narrative literature review design will be used to navigate the continuous challenge. Non-isiXhosa students require a clear explanation of these differences, and teachers need to understand their backgrounds. The thematic analysis must be used to identify and project themes in response to this problem.

Keywords: Noun-Class, Umfundisi, Umlambo, Morphology, Linguistics, Aspect of Morphological Theory

INTRODUCTION

The conundrum is experienced by linguists, teachers, and students when they encounter the isiXhosa prefix "um", which falls under the noun classes 1 and 3. It is easy to remember and identify, especially if exposed to nouns created around those prefixes. Dowling, Deyi, & Whitelaw (2017) discuss the importance of studying nouns in understanding concords in morphology. All linguistic development of the lexicon in isiXhosa stems from an understanding of nouns and concordance in the language.

In all isiXhosa sentences and semantic studies (message), nouns, verbs, and/or adverbs must always agree. The initial (um-) in isiXhosa noun class 1 refers to human (singular), (being), or person (umntu/*person*; umntwana/*child*, umfundisi, umzalwane/*brother at church*, umsengi/*milker*, and so on). The second (um-) noun class 3 of isiXhosa refers to nonhuman (singular) natural things such as umlambo/*river*, umyezo/*vineyard*, umzi/*house*, and umthi/*tree*. All non-human nouns fall into this category. Furthermore, Jonas (2018) adds that the noun class system is a strong feature of all Bantu languages, with nouns classified according to their prefixes (Katamba, 2014, p. 103). In terms of structure, a noun comprises a stem and a prefix, and in Bantu languages, nouns are classified according to their prefixes. The noun class system in Bantu languages is organized around essential semantic traits, including animacy, form, and humanness, with the number of noun classes varying from language to language. Noun class assignments can be based on semantic, morphological, and/or phonological factors." Noun class

systems exist in agglutinative languages like Bantu, where nouns incorporate information about the "noun class, person, and case.

(*Um-*) **um**lambo ugcwele (***the river is complete***): noun class 3

(*Um-*) **um**ntwana uyakhala. (***The child is crying.***) noun class 1

There is a mother-tongue language, which is inherited during pregnancy from the mother's womb. Learning a non-native language involves learning a language that is distinct from one's native language, either through formal education or societal influence. Children, learners, and language acquisition are among the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development (Gobodwana, 2023).

In this article, I will answer the following question:

1. Which language-related pedagogies are applied in teaching isiXhosa as a non-mother tongue?
2. What examples and approaches to the conundrum between isiXhosa noun class 1 and noun class 3 to non-mother tongues?
3. How is this article going to contribute to knowledge in the topic at hand?
4. This article aims to address the challenges associated with isiXhosa, particularly those concerning noun classes 1 and 3, which are especially pronounced among non-native speakers.

This aim was motivated by my experience teaching isiXhosa at Rhodes University to a multilingual community of Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students, who were not native speakers of the language. Frequent questions they constantly as were between noun class 1 and noun class 3, the prefix um-

Why can't we allocate all um- prefix nouns under one noun class?

Consequently, this article aims to clarify the confusion arising from the application of the foundational theory known as the Aspect Theory of Morphology (ATM). This theoretical framework will help address students' inquiries and uncertainties. Additionally, it will propose a teaching strategy suitable for instructing non-native speakers of African Indigenous Languages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the South African education system, it is a requirement that children in the foundational phase of their education be instructed in the language prevalent in their region. This implies that, as noted by Gobodwana (2023), children in the Eastern Cape will receive instruction in the following languages: isiXhosa, English, and Afrikaans. The rationale behind this is that these languages are recognized as provincial document languages by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB).

Furthermore, the South African language curriculum for educational institutions embodies the core values of equality and humanity. It is designed with an output-oriented approach, aiming to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to thrive in local environments, pursue higher education, and successfully enter the workforce. In 2011, South Africa introduced the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for additional languages, which includes precise requirements for programs, promotions, and assessments (Minas, 2017). Lastly, CAPS is clear in support that children should be taught in their mother language.

In this article, I aim to elaborate on the fact that institutions of higher education also offer bilingual and multilingual education, where educators are expected to possess proficiency in at least one additional language recognized by provincial legislation for the purpose of effective communication. This prepares preservice teachers to engage with the varied educational landscape that South Africa is experiencing in relation to language policy implementation and linguistic guidance.

Significance of Understanding Noun Classes

In Bantu languages, noun classes are crucial for understanding the language. Potter & Faulconer (1979) suggest that a key aspect of language comprehension research is how word meanings are integrated to form the understanding of a sentence. One potential explanation is that the meaning of each word is accessed independently of the sentence context and subsequently combined with the meanings of preceding words. For example, the ability to understand and visualize word structure on the chalkboard helps students retain this information and enhances their differentiation skills.

Furthermore, Jonas (2018) presents a significant argument regarding the importance of isiXhosa noun classes. She states, "In Bantu languages, noun class systems are an essential characteristic, where nouns are classified based on their prefixes." Additionally, she explains that in isiXhosa, a Bantu language, a noun stem is affixed to a prefix, followed by morphological processes; for instance, the um-... serves as the [prefix] in isiXhosa, while the -ntu-... represents a [stem].

(Jonas, 2018:14) …I quote….

> *"The noun class prefix's main purpose is to serve as a "morphological class template for each class", therefore accounting for the claim that the noun class systems of Bantu languages are sometimes viewed as arbitrary morphological systems with little semantic bearing (Zawada & Ngcobo 2008: 316; Demuth 2000: 270)."*

METHOD AND DESIGN

In developing a robust methodology and design for this article, I will employ the Aspects of the Theory of Morphology (ATM). Mel′čuk (2006) emphasizes that ATM serves to cultivate and refine various concepts within the framework of linguistic morphology. Given that morphology seeks to enlighten linguists regarding the processes of word formation and evolution. I am going to outplay the isiXhosa exemplary morphemes that have similar prefixes and confuse the non-mother speakers of the language.

isiXhosa noun classes	
Noun class 1: prefix; um-	**Noun class 3: prefix; um-**
Description: **Nouns to humans**: (Umzali/*parent*; umtshana/*nephew/niece*; umntwana/child; umlimi/*plougher* **Nouns to nations/tribes**: (umSuthu/*Sotho tribe*; umXhosa/*Xhosa tribe*; uMvenda/*Venda tribe*.) **Nouns formed from verbs**: (umpheki/*cooker/chef*); umthungi/*Taylor*; umbhali/*author*; umqhubi/*driver. etc*)	**Description**: **Nouns to plants and trees**: (umnga/*sweet thorn*; umkhiwane/*Ficus tree*; umthombothi/ *Tamboti tree*) **Nouns from nature and animals**: (umlambo/*river*; umvundla/*rabbit;* umqolomba/*cave*; umfula/*swamp*; umthombo/spring of fountains; umbane/*electricity/lightning*; umthunzi/*shade*; umoya/*wind*. **Nouns body parts**: (umlenze/*leg*; umlomo/*mouth*; umqala/*throat*) **Nouns to things**: (umsebenzi/*job/employee*; umnyango/*door*; Umkhonto/*spear*.) **Nouns to clothing**: (umbhaco/traditional skirt; umnweba/; umbhinqo/traditional Xhosa shawl/shoulder cloth.

Jonas (2018) asserts that noun classes are essential, and their categorization is based on specific semantic groups. However, the current inquiry revolves around the influence of their semantic significance on the preservation of certain noun classes, while others have disappeared in various Bantu languages. The examples provided are derived from the isiXhosa noun classes bibliography, and given my background in teaching isiXhosa, I found it straightforward to formulate these descriptions and analyses.

Furthermore, in addition to the examples cited (Zawada & Ngcobo, 2008), it is explained that the nouns in a language like isiZulu have historically been viewed as an arbitrary morphological framework, despite the identification of broad notional categories (including human beings, animals, body parts, nature, and general objects, etc.). The notion that a complex formal structure, such as the noun class system in the Southern African Bantu languages, could evolve without any conceptual or semantic foundation has been challenged by the principles of Cognitive Linguistics, which posit that form and meaning are closely interconnected, with forms being driven by their function and meaning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Teaching Language-Related Pedagogies in Teaching isiXhosa as a Non-Mother Tongue

The widely recognized role of a teacher is to serve as a trainer and conveyor of knowledge and skills to students within the classroom environment. In the context of pedagogical practice, it is essential for the teacher to deliver this knowledge, often without a clear understanding of the abilities of the children they are instructing. For instance, while I was teaching isiXhosa to a group of PGCE students who were not native speakers, I was informed by the institution's policy without prior knowledge of the students I would be teaching at that moment. In addition to the discussion made by Krause and Prinsloo (2016), educators within both national and regional educational frameworks globally face diverse groups of students characterized by linguistic and sociocultural differences, especially in non-mother-tongue classrooms. Ultimately, to my astonishment, I discovered that some students had no familiarity with isiXhosa, not even a basic greeting in the language, despite coming from diverse backgrounds in the South African context and abroad.

Notwithstanding this, I was assigned the responsibility of instructing them on noun classes to enhance their comprehension of the structure of isiXhosa nouns. Therefore, this article seeks to provide a summary of two widely used teaching strategies: teacher-centered and learner-centered methods. The notion that learners should engage actively in the process of knowledge construction is frequently interpreted as suggesting a reduced role for the educator within the educational framework. Educators are encouraged to forgo exclusive claims to authority or dominance in the classroom environment. Consequently, the teacher's function is redefined to that of a coach or facilitator (Sukvijit, 2009).

Brown (2003:50-51) discusses the very inductive claim that both methodologies acknowledge the student as a crucial element in enhancing academic performance. The teacher-centered methodology assigns the responsibility for learning to the educator, who utilizes their expertise in subject matter to assist students in forming connections. Understanding the learner and their information processing is considered a secondary priority. Conversely, the learner-centered methodology emphasizes the importance of recognizing individual learner abilities and fostering an environment conducive to making educational connections. In this approach, the responsibility for achievement is also transferred to the student.

Educators offer a diverse array of instructional strategies and techniques designed to help students construct their own learning and develop a framework for applying knowledge and theoretical concepts. (Sukvijit, 2009) presents a compelling comparison between teacher-centered and learner-centered methodologies in the classroom, highlighting this distinction.

Teacher-centered pedagogy is frequently characterized by a dynamic where the teacher is active while the student remains passive.

Conversely, learner-centered education emphasizes the concept of an engaged student. Therefore, students were engaging directly and indirectly by indicating to the teacher that they are noticing the similarity of noun class 1 and noun class 3, prefix um-, but the difference in morphological structural development, i.e, umntu noun class 1; whereas umlambo noun class 3. This conundrum needed to be explained and discussed with the students. Lastly, from this perspective, the teacher does not serve as the main source of knowledge within the classroom. Rather, the educator is perceived as a facilitator or coach, aiding students who are regarded as the principal architects of their own learning.

Teacher-Centered Approaches

The teacher-centered approach, therefore, seems to be where a teacher is a dominant leader (Sukvijit, 2009). Teachers, give students instructions on what is expected in the isiXhosa conversational module. Students acknowledge the instructions given to them by the teacher in the classroom. Everything in the classroom is executed by the teacher, and the students become both the receivers and observers of those instructions. According to Brown (2003), this approach is associated with the transmission of knowledge, guided and imparted by the teacher himself in the classroom, with students being the receiver of that knowledge. In addition to that claim, McDonald (2002) clarifies this understanding of the teacher-centered approach by stating that a teacher's work depends on a clear ability to teach skills to students in the classroom. The teacher, being the main source of information, is eager to provide students with relevant knowledge guided by the institution's curriculum.

The following are primarily what teachers do/are expected to be doing in the classroom:
1. Teachers are a catalyst or helper to students who establish and enforce their own rules.
2. Teachers respond to student work through neutral feedback and encourage students to provide alternative/additional responses.
3. Teachers ask mostly divergent questions, and few recall questions

Learner-Centered Approaches

Altan and Trombly (2001) assert that a learner-centered approach serves as a strategy to address challenges within the classroom due to its effectiveness in accommodating diverse needs. Firstly, this methodology is crucial as it scrutinizes all diverse learners to enhance their educational experience. This implies that the teacher assumes the roles of both manager and genuine facilitator, guiding learners in transforming their prior knowledge into new knowledge and skills (Ahmed, 2013). Secondly, in relation to this idea, McCombs (1997) suggested that the learner-centered approach emphasizes the individual characteristics of learners, including their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capabilities, and requirements for acquiring new skills. Thirdly, this approach is defined by its context-sensitive nature (Milambiling, 2001).

Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that the cultural context in which learning takes place has a significant impact on children's education, particularly in relation to provincial languages, which have a profound effect on both learning and teaching within that environment. Additionally, this perspective typically stems from a constructivist viewpoint, which posits that learners develop their understanding through their interactions and experiences in the world (Sukvijit, 2009), with educators embracing a humanising pedagogy. The notion that

students should actively participate in the knowledge construction process is frequently interpreted as suggesting a reduced role for the teacher in the educational journey.

- Students are allowed to select the learning task and the manner and order in which it is completed,
- Students are presented with examples of the content to be learned and are encouraged to identify the rule of behavior embedded in the content.
- Students are encouraged to summarize and review important lesson objectives throughout the lesson and at the conclusion of the activity.
- Students are encouraged to choose new activities in the session and select different topics for study, and
- Students signal their readiness for transition to the next learning set

Theme 2: Examples and Approaches help isiXhosa Non-Mother Students Understand.

In the educational setting, expressions, actions, and interactions are interrelated and 'coalesce' to create the pedagogical framework for students as they engage in learning. The educator assumes the role of facilitator for the expressions, actions, and interactions, and may also adapt to the students' reciprocal methods. Mahon et al. (2017). Distinct categories of pertinent expressions, actions, and interactions are synchronized to fulfill the objective of the practice, which is to convey new knowledge and skills between educators and learners (Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014, p. 26). Moreover, the expressions, actions, and interactions that constitute practices occur simultaneously, indicating that practices cannot be simplified to any single action. Consequently, this discourse is aptly framed from the viewpoint that both teacher-centered and learner-centered methodologies are present in the classroom, with these approaches being particularly interconnected in the 21st century.

Firstly, the teacher provides clear guidelines to students, outlining what is going to happen in this lesson. Students, in the same breath, do what the teacher instructs them to do in the classroom during the lesson. Ultimately, students and teachers are now able to relate to the day's lesson objective. Let me draw a practical example:

- **Teacher:** Students, we are now listing all the isiXhosa noun classes from noun class 1 to noun class 15. (This is an easy instruction by the teacher to students in the classroom, and it requires them to act on it as the teacher writes on the board, they are also writing in their books)
- **Teacher:** Noun class 1; prefix is um- (all human identities are produced and manufactured under this noun class); (umntwana/child; umntu/person, umfundisi/pastor, umfazi/wife, umlobi/fisherman, umzingengeli, etc).
- **Teacher:** noun class 3; prefix is um- (all unliving things, including nature, are found here.) (umlambo/river, umlenze/*leg,* umfula/*swamp*, umqolomba/*cave*, etc.)

The triangulation approach to learning theory, which emphasizes the concept of 'doing' as articulated by Kemmis (2014), is elaborated upon below, detailing what students should be engaged in and how they were able to readily identify the prefix similarity despite variations in noun formulation:

Students: As the examples were listed to them in the lesson, they have identified these similarities in the prefixes of both noun class 1 and noun class 3. The explanation mentioned was that there is a difference between the two noun classes in development.

Theme 3: Merging of (Noun Class 1 and the Noun Class 3)

The amalgamation of noun class 1 and noun class 3 is deemed unfeasible, as this article has elucidated that there exists a divergent interpretation or comprehension. The article clarifies that noun class 1 is centered on human characteristics, human nomenclature, and onomastics, whereas noun class 3 pertains to nature, objects, and the human body. Consequently, any attempt to linguistically merge these classes would constitute an under-analysis of the subject matter within the field of linguistics, particularly concerning morphological aspects. Thus, this article has rendered the distinctions remarkably clear and accessible to non-native speakers of isiXhosa in the following:

Noun Class: 1

Prefix: um-
Nouns: umntu/*person*; umntwana/*child*; umfundisi/*pastor*; umlobi/*fisherman*; umngcatshi/*traitor*; umzingeli/*hunter*; umculi/*singer*; etc

Noun Class: 3

Prefix: um-
Nouns: umlambo/*river*; umthi/*tree*; umlenze/*leg*; umngxuma/*hole*; etc.

Therefore, another reason is that they will not be able to afford the merging of these noun classes. It is because, in noun class 1, all the nouns are in a singular form and structure. And those singular nouns are therefore pluralized in noun class 2. Same as that of noun class 3. The nouns in noun class 4 are a plural noun of class 3. Therefore, if the noun is not pluralized effectively in noun classes 2 and 4, it indicates that it does not belong to the singular noun class, and linguists cannot apply the merger between the two conundrum noun classes.

Noun Class 1

Prefix: um-
Singular: Umntu/*person*; umntwana/*child*; umfundisi/*pastor*; umlobi/*fisherman*; umngcatshi/traitor; umzingeli/fisherman; umculi/*singer*; etc

Noun Class 2

Prefix: ab-; abe-
Plural: abantu/people; abantwana/children; abefundisi/*pastors*; abalobi/*fishermen*; abangcatshi/*traitors*; abazingeli/*hanters*; abaculi/*singers*, etc.

Noun Class 3

Prefix: um-
Singular: umlambo/*river*; umthi/*tree*; umlenze/*leg*; umngxuma/*hole*, etc.

Noun Class 4

Prefix: im -
Plural: imilambo/*rivers*; imithi/*trees*; imilenze/*legs*; imingxuma/*holes*, etc.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As discussed in the article, the dilemma arises between the two closely related isiXhosa noun classes 1 and 3, both of which utilize the prefix **um-**. These classes share a common prefix in their noun development and structural organization. It is essential to note that the integration of these noun classes may lead to a situation of subtractive bilingualism among students (Dowling, Deyi, & Whitelaw, 2017). This implies that non-native speakers may face challenges when teaching in an environment dominated by isiXhosa children. Such a scenario would contradict the principles of multilingualism and a multicultural approach to education that the nation upholds. In the context of Southern Bantu languages, the noun classification system is crucial for linguists, as it highlights the focus on noun-structural development across the diverse linguistic landscape of South Africa. Furthermore, within noun class systems, prefixes serve as markers for gender, nature, objects, and quantity (Herbert, 1985, p. 173). Nouns are categorized into classes based on their prefixal morphemes, referred to as NPx, which are significant because the concordial morphemes derived from NPx typically bear a close resemblance to them (Dowling, Deyi, & Whitelaw, 2017:42).

I suggested that, given South Africa's status as a multilingual nation, it recognize 11 to 12 official languages. The article posits that emphasizing the use of noun classes would be optimal; however, considering the country's diversity, how can this article effectively accommodate isiXhosa non-native speakers in a bilingual or multilingual higher education setting? I recommended that the translanguaging teaching method be employed verbatim to support students who are not well-versed in the language. This translanguaging approach would involve interpreting isiXhosa and English, or translating isiXhosa nouns into English, thereby enabling these students to access and engage with the material presented in the interactive classroom.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, A. K. (2013). Teacher-centered versus learner-centered teaching style. *Journal of Global Business Management*, *9*(1), 22.

Brown, K. L. (2003). From teacher-centered to learner-centered curriculum: Improving learning in diverse classrooms. *Education*, *124*(1).

Costa, B. (2010). Mother tongue or non-native language? Learning from conversations with bilingual/multilingual therapists about working with clients who do not share their native language. *Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*, *3*(1), 15–24.

Dowling, T., Deyi, S., & Whitelaw, E. (2017). Merger of noun classes 3 and 1: A case study with bilingual isiXhosa-speaking youth. *South African Journal of African Languages*, *37*(1), 41–49.

Jonas, K. (2018). *Perceived object similarity in isiXhosa: assessing the role of noun classes* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Hardy, I., Grootenboer, P., Bristol, L., ... & Bristol, L. (2014). Praxis, practice and practice architectures. *Changing practices, changing education*, 25-41.

Krause, L. S., & Prinsloo, M. (2016). Translanguaging in a township primary school: Policy and practice. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, *34*(4), 347-357.

McCombs, B. L. (1997). Self-assessment and reflection: Tools for promoting teacher changes toward learner-centered practices. *Nassp Bulletin*, *81*(587), 1–14.

Mel′čuk, I. A. (2006). *Aspects of the Theory of Morphology* (Vol. 146). Walter de Gruyter.

Milambiling, J. (2001). More Than Talk: A Proposal for TESOL Teacher Education. *TESOL Journal, 10*(4), 3-4.

Minas, E. C. (2017). *Complexity in task-based language teaching and learning of isiXhosa as a second language in primary schools* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

Potter, M. C., & Faulconer, B. A. (1979). Understanding noun phrases. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 18*(5), 509–521.

Sukvijit, T. (2009). Beyond student-centered and teacher-centered pedagogy: Teaching and learning as guided participation. *Pedagogy and the human sciences*.

Zawada, B., & Ngcobo, M. N. (2008). A cognitive and corpus-linguistic re-analysis of the acquisition of the Zulu noun class system