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A Comparative Study of the Morphosemantics of the Noun between Nyakyusa and Swahili

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Abstract
This paper offers a comparative morphosemantic description of nouns in Nyakyusa and Swahili, aiming to identify similarities and differences in their noun class systems. Data were collected through elicited word and sentence lists of names of various objects and phenomena found in the environments of speakers residing in Kyela District for Nyakyusa data, and in Morogoro, Mbeya, Dodoma, and Dar es Salaam for Swahili data. Additionally, word and sentence lists were compiled through a review of available written documents, particularly Nyakyusa and Swahili dictionaries. The findings show that morphologically, Nyakyusa nouns consist of a pre-prefix (augment), a prefix, and a stem, whereas Swahili nouns include only a prefix and a stem. Nyakyusa also retains noun classes 12 and 13 and maintains nasal marking in Class 9 more consistently than Swahili. Semantically, both languages share common patterns, such as the association of Classes 1/2 with human referents and pejorative-augmentative meanings in Classes 4 and 5. A detailed comparison of body-part terminology reveals that 52.3% of items share equivalent class assignments, while the remaining items display language-specific distributions. These findings demonstrate partial overlap alongside systematic differences, highlighting that shared Bantu heritage exists alongside distinct morphosemantic restructuring in each language.

Keywords: *Morphology, noun, Nyakyusa, semantics, Swahili*

Introduction

This paper is a comparative study that describes the morphosemantics of nouns in Nyakyusa and Swahili. Focusing on noun morphosemantics, the paper specifically examines the morphology of nouns in the two languages as well as the semantic classification of nouns. It explores the extent to which names of persons, things, and abstract concepts are categorised into respective noun classes, as well as the meanings derived from each noun class. Swahili and Nyakyusa are suitable for this study because preliminary data reveal both similarities and differences in the morphosemantics of nouns in the two languages, warranting further investigation. Although both languages belong to the Bantu family, they are classified into different zones in Guthrie's alphanumeric classification (Maho, 2009). Furthermore, Swahili serves as Tanzania's national language and lingua franca and is widely spoken across the country, including among speakers of Nyakyusa and other ethnic community languages. Swahili, known to its speakers as *Kiswahili*, is a Bantu language classified in Zone G40 (Maho 2009) of Guthrie's alphanumeric classification. The language has spread rapidly beyond its original geographic boundaries, creating significant demand for its learning across many nations. As the lingua franca of Tanzania and the wider East African Community (EAC), Swahili is also taught in several higher learning

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institutions in countries such as the United States and Germany. In addition, international media outlets, including the Voice of America, Radio Deutsche Welle, the BBC (radio and television), and Asia Radio and TV, broadcast programs in Kiswahili (Akidah 2013). This widespread use exposes Swahili to intense language contact, resulting in the emergence of varied linguistic features across different cultural and geographical contexts. Such contact affects its morphology, phonology, and semantics. Consequently, describing the noun morphosemantics of Swahili in relation to Nyakyusa and other ethnic community languages in Tanzania is essential for understanding its internal growth.

Nyakyusa, known to its speakers as *Kinyakyusa*, is spoken by communities inhabiting the region stretching from Lake Nyasa (Malawi) to the districts of Kyela, Rungwe, and Mbeya in southern Tanzania. The language has two mutually unintelligible dialects: Konde, spoken in the plains near Lake Nyasa in Kyela (Tanzania) and Kalonga (Malawi), and Mwamba, spoken in the highlands of the Rungwe and Livingstone ranges (Persohn 2017). According to Felberg (1996), Nyakyusa is spoken by approximately one million people, with its geographical range extending from the North Rukuru River near Kalonga in Malawi to Mbeya town in Tanzania, although the majority of speakers reside in Tanzania. Classified as M31 in the Bantu language classification, Nyakyusa is one of the ten major ethnic community languages in Tanzania, with 740,020 speakers reported by LOT (2009). Of these, approximately 682,539 speakers live in the Mbeya Region, mainly in the districts of Kyela (138,869 speakers), Rungwe (258,441 speakers), and Mbeya Urban (145,007 speakers).

This study holds both practical and theoretical significance. From a practical perspective, the study serves as a reference tool for researchers, speakers, and anyone interested in learning the languages. From a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge in Bantu linguistics, much of which focuses on noun morphology, specifically, the structure of the noun and the ordering of its elements.

Research on the Bantu noun has attracted sustained scholarly attention, demonstrating its breadth and relevance to many Bantuists. Studies such as Katamba (2003), Dingemanse (2006), Regemalira (2005), (2007), Asheli (2013), Goodness (2017), and Van de Velde (2019) show that the noun system remains a central domain for understanding Bantu morphosyntax and semantics. Collectively, these works illustrate that Bantu noun studies are not only theoretically significant but also empirically rich, drawing on data from a wide range of Bantu languages. The recurring scholarly engagement across different periods and frameworks suggests that the Bantu noun continues to raise important descriptive and analytical questions. However, despite this shared interest, the studies differ considerably in their focus, scope, and methodological approaches.

Some scholars adopt a broad descriptive orientation. For instance, Katamba (2003) provides a general account of the Bantu noun system based on selected Bantu languages, highlighting common morphological patterns such as noun class marking and agreement. Similarly, Rugemalira (2005) and Asheli (2013) approach the noun within comprehensive grammatical descriptions, offering detailed accounts of Runyambo and Shinyiha, respectively. In these works, the noun is treated as part of a wider grammatical system, with attention paid to its interaction with other word classes. In terms of focus, certain studies concentrate on the internal structure and ordering of morphological elements within nouns (e.g., Rugemalira 2007), while others investigate more specific theoretical issues, such as the distinction between inflection and derivation in noun morphology (Robinson 2016). Still other scholars aim to capture the broader picture of derivation in Bantu linguistics, as exemplified by Goodness (2020). Despite the richness of existing literature, a clear research gap remains. Much of the previous work either provides language-specific descriptions or addresses theoretical issues without systematic cross-linguistic comparison of morphosemantic properties. The current study seeks to contribute to this gap by offering a comparative analysis of nouns in Nyakyusa and Swahili. By examining both morphological and semantic aspects of the noun in these two languages, the study extends existing descriptions and provides new insights into how morphosemantic properties are structured and realised across Bantu languages. In doing so, it complements earlier research while advancing comparative understanding within Bantu noun studies.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach and was conducted in Kyela District to collect Nyakyusa data and in four urban centres, including Mbeya, Morogoro Municipality, Dar es Salaam, and Dodoma, to collect Swahili data. Data were gathered through direct observation and the compilation of texts from naturally occurring communicative settings, including everyday interactions and public

discourse. In addition, the study reviewed available written sources, particularly the second edition of *Swahili Dictionary* by TUKI and the *Nyakyusa Dictionary* by Felberg (1996), to supplement the naturally collected data.

Through observation and a review of available written texts, a wordlist of 200 words and a sentence list of 40 sentences were compiled and translated into the two languages under study with the assistance of one native speaker of each language. The wordlist comprises names of various entities, including household items, body parts, and natural phenomena such as water bodies, mountains, and hills. Particular attention was paid to noun structure and agreement properties, which formed the basis for the semantic classification of nouns. The data were then analysed comparatively to identify patterns of similarity and difference between Nyakyusa and Swahili. The analysis of the wordlist and sentence data focused on noun morphology and agreement properties to describe noun semantics. This approach enabled a systematic comparison of the two languages, highlighting how similarities and differences in noun classification reflect broader typological and semantic patterns.

Results and Discussions

The main focus of this paper was to describe the morphosemantic properties of nouns between Nyakyusa and Swahili. Secondly, with the aid of the morphosyntactic properties, the paper aimed to describe how these languages under study categorise nouns into classes, with pairs reflecting the singular and plural forms. The findings are divided into two aspects: the first involves showing the relationship between Nyakyusa and Swahili based on noun morphology, and the second involves demonstrating their relationship based on the semantics of nouns, i.e., how these languages classify names of things, people, and ideas/thoughts into different noun classes. Starting with the former, both languages have up to 18 noun classes, and Table 1 demonstrates the structure of a noun in the languages in comparison.

Table 1: A Comparison of The Morphology of a Noun Between Nyakyusa (M31) and Swahili (G42)

M31					**G42**				
			Example	**Gloss**				**example**	**Gloss**
class	**Pre-prefix**	**Prefix**			**class**	**Pre-prefix**	**prefix**		
1	*u-*	*mu-*	*umwana*	‘child’	1		*mu-*	*mtoto*	‘a child’
2	*a-*	*bha-*	*abhaana*	‘children’	2		*wa-*	*watoto*	‘children’
3	*u-*	*mu-*	*umpiki*	‘tree’	3		*mu-*	*mti*	‘a tree’
4	*i-*	*mi-*	*imipiki*	‘trees’	4		*mi-*	*miti*	‘trees’
5	*i-*	*li-*	*iliino*	‘tooth’	5		*ji-*	*jino*	‘tooth’
6	*a-*	*ma-*	*amiino*	‘teeth’	6		*ma-*	*meeno*	‘teeth’
7	*i-*	*ki-*	*kiibho*		7		*ki*	*kiti*	‘a chair’
8	*i-*	*fi-*	*ifiibho*		8		*vi*	*viti*	‘chairs’
9	*i-*	*N*	*Ing’osi*	‘sheep’	9		*N*	*ng’ombe*	‘cow’
10	*i-*	*N*	*imbafu*	‘ribs’	10		*N*	*mbavu*	‘rib’
11	*u-*	*lu-*	*ulubhafu*	‘rib’	11		*u*	*ubavu*	‘a rib’
12	*a-*	*ka-*	*akaana*	‘small child’	12	-	-	-	-
13	*u-*	*tu-*	*utwana*	‘small’ ‘children	13	-	-	-	-
14	*u-*	*bhu-*	*nunu*	‘goodness’	14		*u*	zuri	‘goodness’
15	*u-*	*ku-*	*lima*	‘cultivating’	15		*ku*	lima	‘cultivating’
16		*Pa*	*kaja*	‘at home’			*pa*		
17		*Ku*	*mbeje*	‘to Mbeya’			*ku*		
18		*Mu*	*nyumba*	‘in the house’			*mu*		

As Table 1 demonstrates, the Nyakyusa noun comprises a pre-prefix, prefix and the stem, while Swahili noun comprises the prefix and the stem only. In Nyakyusa, as shown in the table, the pre-prefix constitutes a copy of the vowel of the noun prefix. Additionally, classes 12 and 13 are only attested in Nyakyusa but not in Swahili. In the two languages, the vowel [u] constituting the noun prefix *mu-* for classes 1 and 3 undergoes a synchronic loss. This makes some Bantuists analysing noun structure in Swahili refer to *m-* as the noun for classes 1 and 3. However, while this deletion/loss of the vowel of the

noun prefix signifying classes 1 and 3 gives way for other phonological processes in Nyakyusa to take place, in Swahili, nothing whatsoever happens.

After deletion of the vowel of the noun prefix in Nyakyusa, two phonological processes shape the morphological shape of the respective nouns. These processes involve gliding, homorganic nasal assimilation and consonant alternation. Starting with gliding, the underlying word for a noun in class 1 *u-mu-ana* changes to *umwana,* as its surface form. The high vowel [u] becomes [w] when occurring before another vowel. It is worth noting that when the class 1 noun prefix *mu combines* with its stem, *ana* leads to a sequence of two dissimilar vowels [ua] whose sequence is not possible in Nyakyusa. A sequence of similar vowels in Nyakyusa leads to long vowels, which are permissive in the language.

Another phonological process shaping the noun in Nyakyusa includes homorganic nasal assimilation, as in the underlying form [u-mu-gunda] to its surface form [uŋgunda]. After deletion of the vowel of the noun prefix, the homorganic nasal assimilation takes place where the preceding bilabial nasal consonant [m] assimilates its place feature with the following consonant [g] and hence becomes [ŋ]. and homorganic nasal assimilation exemplified in the underlying form

Semantic Classification of Nouns

In this section, an attempt was made to sort what kind of nouns fall under each class out of the classes attested in Swahili and Nyakyusa. Although some nouns may have lost the markers, essentially, noun class prefixes that help to easily identify the classes of the nouns, we paid particular attention to looking at the morphological behaviour of either of the pair classes in signifying singularity and plurality. Additionally, the morphosyntactic approach was used, that is, the way in which the majority of nouns in particular classes agree with other elements either in a noun phrase or in an utterance/sentence.

Semantic Classification of Classes 1 and 2

A comparison was made between the two languages regarding the semantic classification of nouns in Class 1 and Class 2. Class 1 is marked by the prefix *-mu-* in Nyakyusa and *m-* in Swahili, whereas Class 2 is marked by the prefix *-bha-* in Nyakyusa and *wa-* in Swahili. Examples in (1) illustrate the morphosyntactic properties of Class 1 and Class 2.

(1) a) *u-mu-an-a gu-angu u-mu-nunu a-li -pa -ku -lim -a*
AUG-1-child-FV 1-poss Aug-1-good 1S-past-loc-Inf-cultivate-FV
'My good child is cultivating.'
b) *a -bha -an -a bha-angu a-bha-nunu bha -li-pa-ku-lima*
Aug-2 -child-FV 2-poss Aug-2-good 2 -past-loc-Inf-cultivate-FV
'Our good children are cultivating.'
c) *m-toto wa-ngu m-zuri a-na-lim-a*
1-child 1-poss 1-good 1S-past-cultivate-FV
'My good child is cultivating.'
d) *Wa-toto wa-ngu wa-zuri wa-na-lima*
2-child 2-poss 2-good 1P-past-cultivate-FV
'My good children are cultivating.'

As indicated in examples 1a and 1b, the morphosyntactic property for Nyakyusa class 1 makes the noun prefix *mu-* to agree with *mu-* for the adjective, *gu-* morpheme for possessive and *a-* for subject agreement. Additionally, the class 2 noun prefix *bha-* takes *bha- for adjective, possessive and subject* agreement property. In comparison, Swahili class 1 noun class prefix agrees with *m- for adjective, wa* for possessive and *a-* for subject construction, while the class 2 noun class prefix agrees with *wa-* in all dimensions of adjective, possessive and subject*,* as illustrated by examples 1c and 2d. These noun class prefixes guided the semantic classification of the nouns falling under these classes, including the agreement properties expressed in their morphosyntax.

However, morphologically, five (5) Swahili kinship terms, as illustrated in Table 2, except for *uncle*, *husband*, and *wife*, lack noun-class prefixes. In contrast, only two (2) Nyakyusa kinship terms, namely the words for *sister* and *father*, lack such prefixes. Additionally, in the agreement properties, words for father, sister, mother, brother and aunt in Swahili take *ya-* for class 1 possessive agreement (singular) and za- for class 2 possessive agreement, different from *wa-* as pointed earlier for words for child/children, teacher, assistant, etc. Table 2 presents a comparison of the semantic classification of nouns in Classes 1 and 2 in Swahili and Nyakyusa.

Table 2: Semantic Classification of Nouns in Classes 1 and 2

Swahili		**Nyakyusa**		**Gloss**
Class 1	**Class 2**	**Class 1**	**Class 2**	
Mtu	*watu*	*Umundu*	*abhandu*	'person/persons'
Mtoto	*watoto*	*Umwana*	*abhana*	'child/children'
Msichana	*wasichana*	*Undindwana*	*abhalindwana*	'girl/girls'
Mvulana	*wavulana*	*Undumiana*	*abhalumiana*	'boy/boys'
Mwanamke	*wanawake*	*Unkikulu*	*abhakikulu*	'woman/men'
Mke	*wake*	*Unkasi*	*abhakasi*	'wife/wives'
Mume	*waume*	*Undume*	*abhalume*	'man/men'
Mjomba	*wajomba*	*Umwipya*	*abhipwa*	'uncle/uncles'
Shangazi	*shangazi*	*Unyasenga*	*abhanyasenga*	'aunt/aunts'
Dada	*dada*	*Ilumbu*	*abhalumbu*	'sister/sisters'
Kaka	*kaka*	*Unkulu*	*abhakulu*	'brother/brothers'
Mama	*mama*	*Unna*	*abhanna*	'mother/mothers'
Baba	*baba*	*Ugwise*	*abhagwise*	'father/fathers'
Mwalimu	*walimu*	*Ummanyisi*	*abhamanyisi*	'teacher/teachers'
Msaidizi	*wasaidizi*	*Untuuli*	*abhatuuli*	'helper/helpers'

Semantically, classes 1 and 2 consist of nouns referring to people, kinship terms, and nouns derived from other word classes through agentive nominalizers such as *-i*, as well as the noun-class prefixes *-mu-/-bha-* in Nyakyusa and *m-/wa-* in Swahili. Overall, the nouns in these classes are similar in both Nyakyusa and Swahili, and no semantic mismatches were observed.

On top of that, prefixes for classes 1 and 2 can be used to derive nouns from other word classes, particularly verbs in these languages (also see Robinson & Mwaipape 2022), as exemplified in (1). For instance, in Swahili, verbs such as *tumwa* ' be sent' and *enda* 'go', can be prefixed with the class 1 prefix *mu-* to form the nouns *mtumwa* 'a slave' and *mu-enda* 'he/she who goes/ who has passed away. Similarly, Swahili verbs *tunga* 'compose', panda can be prefixed with class 1 prefix m- and the -i agentive to form nouns as in *mtunzi* 'a composer' and *m-panzi* 'sower'. In Nyakyusa, the verb *bhuka* is prefixed with class 1 prefix *mu-* to form a noun *u-mu-bhuuka* (umbuuka) 'the one who has passed away', and *jobha* 'say', *bhomba* 'do', longa 'judge' and lima 'cultivate' are prefixed with *-mu-* and *-i* agentive to form nouns *u-njobhi* 'sayer/talkative' *umbombi* 'the doer', *u-mu-longi* (*undongi*) and *u-mu-limi* (*undimi*) 'the cultivator' respectively.

Semantic Classification of Classes 3 and 4

In the two languages under study, Class 3, with its plural Class 4, constitutes names of a range of things. Nyakusa class 3 is morphologically marked by a noun prefix *-mu-,* and class 4 is marked by noun prefix *-mi-* as the plural marker, while in Swahili, class 3 is marked by *m-* and class 4 by *mi-,* as the plural marker. Examples in (2) illustrate the morphosyntactic property of these classes.

(2) a) *u-mu-piki gu-angu gu-gwile*
Aug-3-tree 3Agr-my 3Agr-has fallen
'My tree has fallen.'
b) *i-mi-piki gi-angu gi-gwile*
Aug-4-tree 4Agr-my 4Agr fallen
'My trees have fallen.'
c) *m-ti wa-ngu u-me-anguka*
3-tree 3Agr-my 3Agr-fallen
My tree has fallen.'
d) *mi-ti ya-ngu i-me-anguka*
3-tree 3Agr-my 3Agr- fallen
'My trees have fallen.'

As examples in (2a and b) indicate, the morphosyntactic property for Nyakyusa class 3 prefix *-mu-* seeks to agree with *-gu* for possessive pronoun, and subject within the verb. Nyakyusa class 4 prefix *-mi-* takes *gi-* for possessive agreement and the same morpheme for the subject within the verb. In comparison, Swahili Class 3 prefix *m-* agrees with *m- for the adjective, wa- for the possessive pronoun and u-* for the subject within the verb. But Class 4 prefix *mi-* takes *mi-* for adjective, with *ya-* for possessive and *i-* for subject within the verb. These noun class prefixes guided the semantic

classification of the nouns falling under these classes, including the agreement properties expressed in their morphosyntax. Table 3 presents a comparison of the semantic classification of nouns in classes 3 and 4 in Swahili and Nyakyusa. The asterisk (*) used in the tables throughout this text indicates that the example provided does not belong to the noun class specified in the table heading. The number following the example indicates the noun class to which the example actually belongs in the language.

Table 3: The Semantic Classification of Nouns in Classes 3 and 4

Swahili		**Nyakyusa**		**Gloss**
Class 3	**Class 4**	**Class 3**	**Class 4**	
Mti	*Miti*	*Umpiki*	*imipiki*	'tree/trees'
Mpira	*mipira*	*Umpila*	*imipila*	'ball/balls'
Mchezo	*michezo*	*Unkino*	*imikino*	'game/games'
Mkuki	*mikuki*	*Undunda*	*imilunda*	'arrow/arrows'
Msumeno	*misumeno*	*Unsumeno*	*imisumeno*	'saw/saws'
Msumari	*misumari*	*Unsumali*	*imisumali*	'nail/nails'
Mwiba	*miiba*	*Umwifwa*	*imifwa*	'thorn/thorns'
Mkono	*mikono*	**ikibhoko-7*	**lfibhoko-8*	'arm/arms'
Mgomba	*migomba*	**ikijinja -7*	**ifijinja -8*	'banana tree'
Mguu	*miguu*	**ikilundi -7*	**ifilundi -8*	'leg/legs'
Mkundu	*mikundu*	**ikinielo -7*	**ifinielo-8*	'anus'
Mkojo	*mikojo*	*Nill*	**amatusi-6*	'urine'
Mhogo	*mihogo*	**ijabhu -5*	**amajabhu -6*	'cassava/cassavas'
Mgongo	*migongo*	**inyuma -9*	**inyuma -9*	'back/backs'
**shamba*-5	*mashamba-6	*Ungunda*	*imigunda*	'farm/farms'
**kichwa-7*	**vichwa-8*	*u-mu-tu (untu)*	*i-mi-tu*	'head/heads'

As Table 3 indicates, classes 3 and 4 are basically for trees since many names of different tree species in the two languages, including names of fruits for fruit-bearing trees, fall under classes 3 and 4. However, it was noted that a range of other names are also involved in these classes. Of a list of 16 nouns, 7 (43.75%) are semantically shared between the two languages. Out of a list of 18 nouns, 9 (56.25%) under these two classes, 3 and 4, exist in different classes (typically, 4 of them mainly names for body parts such as leg/s, anus and arm/s, and banana tree, fall under classes 7/8, two of them fall under classes 6 the name for urine and 5/6, the name for cassava and one of them falls under class 9, the name for back) in Nyakyusa. As Table 3 indicates, classes 3 and 4 classify the tree, the life form, including names of different trees in both languages, Swahili and Nyakyusa. Others include body parts amounting to 5/16 for Swahili, which in Nyakyusa fall under different classes, names for banana and cassava fall under these classes, but in Nyakyusa they fall under classes 7/8 and 5/6, respectively. While the name for a farm in Nyakyusa falls under classes 4 and 3, it falls under classes 5 and 6 in Swahili. Similarly, the names for head/s fall under 3 and 4 in Nyakyusa, while in Swahili they fall under classes 7 and 8.

Additionally, in the realm of semantics, Class 4 is said to acquire an augmentative-pejorative sense when a stem from another class, particularly classes 1 and 2, in both languages studied, is assigned to it. For instance, in Swahili, when the stem -toto for classes 1 and 2 is moved to Class 4 with its prefix *mi-,* it results in *mitoto,* meaning 'ugly big children'. Similarly, in Nyakyusa, the stems *-ana* from classes 1 and 2 result in *i-mi-ana*, sharing the same sense as in Swahili.

The Semantics of Class 5 and Class 6 Nouns

Class 5 is morphologically marked by *li-/* for Nyakyusa and *ji-/* for Swahili, whereas class 6 is marked by the *ma-* class prefix in both languages. The morphosyntactic properties of these classes are illustrated by examples in (3).

(3) a) *i-**li**-ino* ***li**-angu* ***li**-ng'eleng'endwike*
Aug-5-tooth 5Agr-poss 5SM-fracture
'My tooth has been fractured.'
b) *a-**mi**-ino* ***ga**-angu* ***ga**-ng'eleng'endwike*
Aug-6-tooth 6Agr 6SM-fractured
'My teeth have been fractured.'

c) ***ji-****ino* ***la-****ngu* ***li****-me-toboka*
5-tooth 5Agr 5Agr-TA-fractured
'My tooth has been fractured.'
d) ***me****-eno* ***ya****ngu* ***ya****-me-toboka*
6-tooth 6Agr 6Agr-TA-fractured
'My teeth have been fractured.'

As shown in (3), the morphosyntactic property for Nyakyusa class 5 prefix *-li-* agrees with *-li-* for the possessive and the same morpheme *-li-* for the verb subject. The class 6 agreement property in Nyakyusa involves *ga-* for the possessive and the same *ga-* for the verb subject. In Swahili, the class 5 agreement property involves the morpheme *la-* for the possessive and *li-* for the verb subject, and class 6 involves *ya-* for the possessive, with the same *ya-* also used for the verb subject. These noun class prefixes, including the syntactic agreement properties, in the languages, guide the semantic classification of the nouns within these classes, including the agreement properties expressed in their morphosyntax. Table 4 compares the semantic classification of nouns in Classes 5 and 6 of Swahili and Nyakyusa.

Table 4: Semantic Classification of Noun Classes 5 and 6

Swahili		**Nyakyusa**		**Gloss**
Class 5	**Class 6**	**Class 5**	**Class 6**	
Jino	*meno*	*i-li-ino*	*a-miino*	'tooth/teeth'
		i-li-aso		'eye/eyes'
Jicho	*macho*	*(ilyaso)*	*a-ma-aso*	
Chozi	*ma-chozi*	i-sosi	a-ma-sosi	'tear/tears'
Jua	X	i-lusbha	x	'sun'
Kalio	*ma-kalio*	*i-tugalilo*	*a-ma-tugalilo*	'buttock/buttocks'
Tako	*ma-tako*	*i-tanga*	*a-ma-tanga*	'buttock/buttoks'
Yai	*ma-yai*	*i-fumbi*	*a-ma-fumbi*	'egg/eggs'
Goti	*ma-goti*	*i-fundo*	*a-ma-fundo*	'knee/knees'
Titi	*ma-titi*	*i-bhele*	*a-ma-bhele*	'breast/breasts'
Tango	*ma-tango*	*i-tango*	*a-ma-tango*	'cucumber/cucumbers'
Kokoa	*ma-kokoa*	*i-koko*	*a-ma-koko*	'cocoa/cocoas'
Limao	*ma-limao*	*i-lalangi*	*a-ma-lalangi*	'lemon/lemons'
Papai	*ma-papi*	*i-papaju*	*a-ma-papaju*	'papaya/papayas'
Parachichi	*ma-palachichi*	*i-takapela*	*a-ma-takapela*	'avocado/ovacadoes'
Fenesi	*mafenesi*	*i-fenesi*	*a-ma-fenesi*	'type of fruit'
Tone	*ma-tone*	*i-tone*	*a-ma-tone*	'drop/drops'
Tunda	*ma-tunda*	*i-tunda*	*a-ma-tunda*	'fruit/fruits'
Pipa	*ma-pipa*	*i-pipa*	*a-ma-pipa*	'drum/drums'
Dari	*ma-dari*	*i-julu*	*a-ma-julu*	'ceiling'
X	*Maji*	x	*a-miisi*	'water'
X	*mawese*	x	*a-ma-bhwese*	'palm oil'
X	*mafuta*	x	*a-ma-futa*	'oil'
*ngoma -9	*ngoma -9	*i-ng'oma*	*a-ma-ng'oma*	'drum/traditional dance'
*muhogo-3	*mihogo-4	*i-jabhu*	*a-ma-jabhu*	'cassava'
*ubao-11	*mbao-10	*i-tapwa*	*a-ma-tapwa*	'wood'
Shamba	*mashamba*	*ungunda-3	*imigunda-4	'farm/s'
X	*ma-ziwa*	*ulukama* -11	*ingama*-10	'milk/milks'

In Table 4, the letter x indicates that the counter class is missing or that the nouns only have plural forms without singular forms, which essentially fall under class 5. Additionally, based on the table, out of a list of 27 items, 19 are shared by both languages and 8 fall in different classes respectively. For instance, words for drum (*ing'oma*), cassava (*ijabhu/amajabhu*), and wood (*itapwa/amatapwa*), which in Nyakyusa fall under classes 5 and class 6, fall in classes 9, 3/4 and 11/10 in Swahili. Regarding semantic categorisation of these nouns, classes 5 and 6 comprise names of body parts (amounting to 6/27 for Swahili and Nyakyusa). Also, the classes comprise names of different fruits and their life forms (7/27 for Swahili and Nyakyusa), names of various liquids (6/27 for Swahili and 5/27 for Nyakyusa), names of oval/round things such as sun and eggs and names of house parts, with both Swahili and Nyakyusa accounting for 1/25.

In Swahili, the class 6 prefix *ma-* derives an augmentative sense when a stem from other classes is attached with the prefix of this class. For example, *m-toto* 'a child', which falls under class 1, when its stem is attached to the class 6 prefix *ma-* forms *matoto* 'big and ugly children'. It is usually observable in Swahili casual conversation where children and youth tend to double prefix stems from other classes for intensifying augmentatives, as in *ma-mi-lima* (6-4-hill) 'big mountains' *ma-mi-ti* (6-4-tree)'big trees', *ma-vi-atu* (6-7-shoe) 'a lot of shoes'. In this noun prefix doubling, it is observed that only the classes for plural are the ones that agree to co-occur with the class 6 prefix *ma-,* which also marks plural.

Semantic Classification of Class 7 and Class 8

A comparison was made using a list of 20 Swahili and Nyakyusa nouns from classes 7 and 8 regarding their morphosemantics, including the syntactic properties. In Swahili, Class 7 is morphologically marked by the noun-class prefix *ki-*, and Class 8 by *vi-*, whereas in Nyakyusa, Class 7 is marked by *-ki-* and Class 8 by *-fi-*. Examples in (4) show the morphosyntactic properties of these classes.

(4) a) *i-**ki**-kota* ***ki**-angu* (kyangu) ***ki**-konywike*
Aug-7-chair 7-my *SM-is broken*
'My chair is broken.'
b) *i-**fi**-kota* ***fi**-angu* (fyangu) ***fi**-konywike*
Aug-8-chair 8-my *SM- imbrication*
'My chair is broken.'
c) ***ki-**ti* ***ch-a**ngu* ***ki**-me-vunjika*
7-chair *7-my* *SM-TA-break*
'My chair is broken.'
d) ***vi-**ti* ***vi-a**ngu (vyangu)* ***vi**-me-vunjika*
8-chair *8-my* *SM- TA-break*
'My chairs are broken.'

As examples in (4) show, Nyakyusa Class 7 prefix *ki- agrees with ki* for both possessive and subject within the verb and Class 8 noun prefix *fi-* agrees with *fi-* for both possessive and subject within the verb. Additionally, Swahili Class 7 prefix *ki-* agrees with *ch-* for both possessive and *ki-* for subject within the verb, and Class 8 noun prefix *vi-* agrees with *vi-* for both possessive and subject in the verb. These noun class prefixes, including the agreement properties expressed in their morphosyntax, influenced the semantic classification of nouns within these classes. Table 5 compares the semantic classification of nouns in classes 7 and 8 in Swahili and Nyakyusa.

Table 5: Semantic Classification of Class 7 and Class 8

Swahili		**Nyakyusa**		**Gloss**
Class 7	**Class 8**	**Class 7**	**Class 8**	
Kiti	*viti*	*ikikota*	*Ifikota*	'chair/s'
Kisu	*visu*	**ummage-3*	**imimage-4*	'knife/ves'
Kinu	*vinu*	*ikituli*	*Ifituli*	'motor'
Kitanda	*vitanda*	*ikitala*	*Ifitala*	'bed/s'
Kikapu	*vikapu*	*ikiibho*	*Ifiibho*	'basket/s'
Kijiko	*vijiko*	**ikijiko*	**ifijiko*	'spoon/s'
Kichaka	*vichaka*	*ikisyanju*	*ifisyanju*	'bush/es'
Kidole	*vidole*	*ikyobhe*	*Ifyobhe*	'finger/s'
Kifua	*vifua*	*ikipambaga*	*ifipambaga*	'chest/s'
Kiumbe	*viumbe*	*ikibhumbigwa*	*ifibhumbigwa*	'creature/s'
Chura	*viura*	*ikyula*	*Ifyula*	'frog/s'
Kiuno	*viuno*	**unsana-3*	**imisana-4*	'wrist/s'
Kichocho	*vichocho*	**ingeleketwa-9*	**ingeleketwa-9*	'schistosomiasis'
Kichwa	*vichwa*	**untu-3*	**imitu-4*	'head/s'
**mlima-3*	**milima-4*	*ikyamba*	*Ifyamba*	'mountain/s'
**mkundu-3*	**mikundu-4*	*ikinielo*	*Ifinielo*	'anus'
**shamba-5*	**mashamba-6*	*ikyalo*	*Ifyalo*	'farm/s'
**mgomba-3*	**migomba-4*	*ikijinja*	*Ifijinja*	'banana tree'
**mkono-3*	**mikono-4*	*ikibhoko*	*Ifibhoko*	'hand/s'
**mhindi/hindi3/5*	**mahindi/mihindi-4/6*	*ikilombe*	*ifilombe*	'maize/s'

As Table 5 indicates, out of the list of 20 names, the classes for 11 names are shared by both languages under study. Overall, while 14 of the 20 names of things fall under classes 7 and 8 in Swahili, 15 fall under these classes in Nyakyusa. This indicates that 6 things classified under classes 7 and 8 in Nyakyusa are in different classes in Swahili, including classes 3/4 and 5/6. Additionally, five items in classes 7 and 8 in Swahili are in different classes in Nyakyusa, including 1/2, 3/4, and 9. Regarding semantic categorisation, these classes comprise nouns that reflect things used in the home, such as chairs, spoons, and baskets (6/20 for Swahili and 5/20 for Nyakyusa), body parts (4/20 for Swahili and 5/20 for Nyakyusa), diseases like *kichocho* and mental disorders (2/20 for Swahili but 0/20 for Nyakyusa, as these fall under classes 9 and 1/2 respectively), living things (2/20 for both Swahili and Nyakyusa), crops (2/20 for Nyakyusa and 0/20 for Swahili, as these fall under classes), land features such as mountains and farms (2/20 for Nyakyusa and 0/20 for Swahili, as these fall under classes 3/4 and 5/6 respectively).

In addition to the basic categorisation of nouns into grammatical classes, the classes 7 and 8 prefixes are also productively used to derive new semantic meanings when attached to stems that originally belong to other noun classes. These derivational uses go beyond simple agreement and reflect language-specific semantic extensions. In Swahili, the class 7 and 8 prefixes *ki-* and *vi-* typically encode a diminutive meaning, expressing smallness or endearment. For instance, when *ki-* and *vi-* are prefixed to the class 1/2 stem *-toto* 'child', they yield *kitoto* and *vitoto*, meaning 'small child' and 'small children', respectively. By contrast, in Nyakyusa the corresponding class 7 and 8 prefixes *ki-* and *fi-* do not convey diminution but rather a pejorative or derogatory sense. Thus, when the same stem is prefixed in Nyakyusa, it results in *i-kiana* and *i-fiana*, which mean 'bad child' and 'bad/ugly children', respectively. This contrast illustrates how identical noun class morphology can develop distinct semantic functions across Bantu languages.

Semantic Classification of Class 9

This class is morphologically marked by a nasal, and its morphosyntactic properties in the languages are indicated in (5).

(5) a) *i-**ng'o**-mbe* ***ji**-angu* ***ji**-bhin-ile*
Aug-9-cow 9Agr-poss 9Agr -ill-Prf
'My cow is ill.'

b) *i-**ng'o**-mbe* ***si*** *-angu* ***si*** *-bhin-ile*
Aug-9-cow 9Agr -poss 9Agr -ill -Prf
'My cows are ill.'

c) ***ng'o**-mbe* ***wa**-angu* ***a**-naumwa*
9-cow 9Agr-poss 9Agr -ill-Prf
'My cow is ill.'

d) ***ng'o**-mbe* ***wa**-angu* ***wa**-naumwa*
9-cow 9Agr-poss 9Agr -ill-Prf
'My cows are ill.'

As indicated in examples (5), class 9 for both languages under study lacks a distinct form for singular and plural. The singular and plural distinctions in this class depend on the agreement patterns. However, in Nyakyusa, the class 9 agreement pattern for the singular is marked in the possessive and in the subject within the verb through morphemes *-ji-* and *-si-* respectively. In Swahili, however, the agreement pattern is marked on the verb's subject (SM) with *a-* for singular and *wa-* for plural. Table 6 compares nouns falling under class 9 between Nyakyusa and Swahili.

Table 6: Class 9 Nouns in Nyakyusa and Swahili

Swahili	Nyakyusa	Gloss
Kuma	*i-ndutu*	'vagina'
Mboo	*i-mbolo*	'penis'
Pua	*i-mbulo*	'nose'
ng'ombe	*i-ng'ombe*	'cow'
Kuku	*i-nguku*	'hen'
Simba	*i-ngalamu*	'lion'
Kenge	*i-mbulu*	'nose'
Nyoka	*i-njoka*	'snake'
Jogoo	*i-ngongobhe*	'cock'

Tetea	*i-ndemba*	'hen'
Ndege	*i-njuni*	'bird'
Njiwa	*i-ngungubhija*	'dove'
Nyumba	*i-nyumba*	'house'
Samaki	*iswi*	'fish'
Tembo	*isofu*	'elephant'
Paka	*nialu*	'cat'
Mbwa	*imbwa*	'dog'
Panya	*imbebha*	'rat'
Kondoo	*Ing'osi*	'sheep'
Mbuzi	*imbene*	'goat'
**kicheche/vicheche-7/8*	*nsyisyi*	'genet'
**kisogo/visogo7/8*	*i-ngono*	'nape'
Fisi	**ikibhole/ifibhole- 7/8*	'hyena'
Ngoma	**ing'oma/amang'oma 5/6*	'drum'

As Table 6 indicates, 6 nouns in Swahili do not begin with a nasal, but they maintain the class 9 morphosyntactic property, while in Nyakyusa, all the nouns examined contain a nasal as a marker for class 9. In a list of 24 names, 20 names fall under the same classes for Swahili and Nyakyusa. However, the names for *kicheche* and nape (*ingono*), which fall under class 9 in Nyakyusa, fall in classes 7 and 8 for Swahili. Similarly, names for hyena (*fisi*), and drum (*ngoma*), which fall under class 9 in Swahili, fall under classes 7/8 and 5/6, respectively, in Nyakyusa. Regarding semantic classification, this class constitutes mainly names of animals, birds and fish. Additionally, the findings indicate that a few names of body parts, amounting to 3/24 for Swahili and 4/24 for Nyakyusa, constitute Class 9.

Semantic Classification of Class 11 and 10 Nouns

In the languages under investigation, Class 11 takes its plural form in Class 10, and the plural is morphologically marked by the noun-class prefixes *-lu-* and N- for Nyakyusa, and by *u-* and N- for Swahili. The morphosyntactic properties of these classes are illustrated by examples in (6).

(6) a) *u-**lu**-bhafu **lu**-angu (lwangu)* ***lu**-konywike*
Aug-11-rib 11Agr-my 11SM- Imbrication
'My rib is broken.'
b) *i-**mba**-fu* ***si**-angu (lwangu)* ***si**-konywike*
Aug-11-rib 11Agr-my 11SM- imbrication
'My ribs are broken.'
c) ***u**-bavu **wa**-angu* ***u**-me-vunjika*
11-rib 11Agr-my 11SM- TA-is broken
'My rib is broken.'
d) ***m**bavu **za**-angu* ***zi**-me-vunjika*
11-rib 11Agr-my 11SM-TA- is broken
'My ribs are broken.'

As examples in (6 a & b) indicate, Nyakyusa Class 11 prefix *-lu-* agrees with *lu-* for possessive agreement and subject in the verb, while Class 10, whose prefix is marked by a nasal sound represented by the capital letter N, agrees with *si-* for both possessive agreement and subject marker (SM) in the verb. While Swahili Class 11 prefix u- agrees with *wa-* for possessive pattern and u- for subject marker (SM), Class 10 agrees with *za-* for possessive and *zi-* for SM.

Table 7: Morphosemantic Classification of Nouns in Classes 11 and 10

Swahili		**Nyakyusa**		**Gloss**
Class 11	**Class 10**	**Class 11**	**Class 10**	
Ubavu	*mbavu*	*Ulubhafu*	*imbafu*	'rib/ribs'
Wembe	*nyembe*	*Ulwembe*	*inyembe*	'razor blade'
Ulimi	*ndimi*	*Ululimi*	*indimi*	'tongue/tongues'
Ungo	*nyungo*	*uluselo*	*iselo*	'sieve'
Ukuta	*kuta*	*ulupaso*	*imbaso*	'fence'
Ukuni	*kuni*	*ulubhabhu*	*imbabhu*	'firewood/firewoods'
Unyayo	*nyayo*	*ulujajo*	*injajo*	'foot/feet'

Ubao	*mbao*	**itapwa-5*	**amatapwa-6*	'wood/woods'
**tete-5*	**matete-6*	*ulutete*	*indete*	'reed/reeds'
**ngozi-9*	**ngozi-9*	*u-lu-papa*	*imbapa*	'skin/skins'
**ndevu-9*	**ndevu-9*	*ululefu*	*indefu*	'beard/beards'
**kidole-7*	**vidole-8*	*u-lobhe*	*inyobhe*	'finger/fingers'
**maziwa-6*	**maziwa-6*	*u-lu-kama*	*ingama*	'milk'
**mto- 3*	**mito-4*	*u-lwise*	*inyisi*	'river/s'
**bonde-5*	**mabonde-6*	*u-lu-sooko*	*isooko*	'plain/s'
**mbazi-9*	**mbazi9*	*u-lu-pange*	*imbaange*	'peas'
**kilago-7*	**vilago-8*	*u-lu-teefu*	*indeefu*	'mat/mats'
Uso	*Nyuso*	*locative*	*locative*	'face/faces'

As Table 7 indicates, of 19 names, 7 (36.84%) fall under the same classes for Swahili and Nyakyusa. It is indicated that 3/19 names which fall into these classes in Nyakyusa fall into classes 5 and 6 in Swahili. Also, 3/19 names fall under class 9, 2/19 fall under classes 7 and 8, and 1/19 fall under classes 3 and 4. Regarding semantic classification, this class constitutes mainly names of body parts (4/19 for Swahili and 5/19 for Nyakyusa), and other things, such as rivers and valleys, for Nyakyusa.

Semantic Classification of Classes 12 and 13

In Nyakyusa, noun classes 12 and 13, which are morphologically marked by the prefixes *-ka-* and *-tu-,* respectively, semantically carry a diminutive meaning as well as an endearment sense. These classes clearly convey a diminutive sense, as illustrated by *a-ka-ana* 'a small child' and *u-tu-ana* 'small child(ren)', where phonological gliding results in the surface form *utwana* 'small children'. This morphological approach differs from what has been reported for Swahili in previous studies of noun morphology. Such studies do not classify noun classes 12 and 13 as productive or present in Swahili; instead, they demonstrate that diminutive meaning is typically conveyed through the use of class 7 and 8 prefixes, *ki-* and vi-. For example, diminutives in Swahili are formed with *ki-* as in *kitoto* 'a small child' and *kinjia* 'a small path', and with *vi-* as in *vitoto* 'small children' and *vinjia* 'small paths', demonstrating a different morphological encoding of diminutiveness from that found in Nyakyusa.

Semantic Classification of Class 14

Class 14 in both Swahili and Nyakyusa is semantically associated with abstract nouns, typically denoting qualities, states, or concepts rather than concrete entities. In Nyakyusa, this class is morphologically marked by the prefix *-bhu-*, as illustrated by *u-bhu-nunu* 'goodness' and *u-bhu-tungulu* 'lie', where the prefix derives abstract meanings from adjectival or nominal bases. Similarly, in Swahili, class 14 nouns are marked by the prefix *u-*, which likewise signals abstractness, as seen in *u-zuri* 'goodness' and *u-ongo* 'lie'. Despite differences in their morphological realisation, both languages employ class 14 as a productive nominal category for encoding abstract semantic concepts, underscoring a shared functional role within the Bantu noun class system.

Table 8: Semantic Classification of Class 14

Swahili	**Nyakyusa**	
Class 14	**Class 14**	**Gloss**
Upendo	*ulugano*	'love'
Utoto	*ubhuana*	'childish'
Umasikini	*ubhulondo*	'poverty'
Uongo	*ubhutungulu*	'lie'
Upana	*ubhupana*	'width'
Urefu	*ubhutali*	'length'
Ujinga	*ubhufwanjalifu*	'ignorance'
Ukimya	*ubhutalalifu*	'calmness'
Ufundi	*ubhumang'anyi*	'craft'
Ujana	*ubhulumyana*	'youth'
Uzee	*ubhukangale*	'oldness'
Ushujaa	*ushujaa*	'bravery'
Ualimu	*ubhumanyisi*	'teaching'
Udereva	*ubhundelefwa*	'driving'
Usichana	*ubhulindwana*	'the fact of being a girl'

One of the reasons some scholars, such as Schadeberg (2001), propose fusing class 14 with class 11 in Swahili is that both classes are morphologically marked by the same prefix *u-,* which blurs the formal distinction between them and motivates a unified analysis. Traditionally, class 11 is associated with the semantics of extended objects, whereas class 14 encodes abstract nouns; however, since both semantic domains are realised with the identical morphological marker *u-,* it is argued that class 11 in Swahili may cover both meanings. Further support for this view comes from Nyakyusa, where the class 11 prefix *-lu-* appears, albeit not productively, in the formation of abstract nouns, a semantic role typically attributed to class 14. Examples such as *u-lu-sekelo* 'happiness', *u-lu-gano* 'loveness', *u-lu-hobhokelo* 'forgiveness', and *u-lu-tengano* illustrate that *-lu-* can encode abstractness in Nyakyusa. Notably, these abstract nouns do not form their plural in class 10, just like other nouns whose original class is 11, indicating that they share key morphological and inflectional properties with class 11. This convergence of morphological marking, semantics, and pluralisation behaviour provides empirical motivation for treating classes 11 and 14 as closely related or even fused in certain Bantu languages.

Semantic Classification of Class 15

Class 15 in both Nyakyusa and Swahili encodes an infinitival or verbal-nominal meaning and is morphologically marked by the prefix *ku-.* In Swahili, the infinitive functions as a noun without an augment, as illustrated in *ku-imba kwake ku-menifurahisha* 'his/her singing has made me happy', where *ku-imba* 'to sing/singing' behaves as a class 15 noun and triggers class-appropriate agreement. Nyakyusa likewise marks the infinitive with *ku-,* but differs in that the noun class prefix occurs together with an augment, yielding forms such as *u-ku-imba ku-ake ku-hobhwisye* 'his/her singing has made me happy', where *u-* is the augment preceding the class 15 prefix *ku-.* Thus, while both languages share the same morphological marker *ku-* to signal the infinitive sense in class 15, they differ typologically in the presence of an augment in Nyakyusa, a feature absent in Swahili.

Semantic Classification of Classes 16, 17 and 18

Classes 16, 17 and 18 are locative noun classes that are morphologically marked by the prefixes *pa-, ku-,* and *mu-,* respectively, in both Swahili and Nyakyusa, and this marking is reflected in their syntactic realisation. In Nyakyusa, class 16 *pa-* encodes specific surface or point locations, as in *pa-mwanya pa mesa* 'on the table', while class 18 *mu-* marks interior locations, illustrated by *mu-nyumba mmyake mununu* 'in his/her house is good', where vowel deletion followed by nasal assimilation yields *nnyumba*. Class 17 *ku-* expresses more general or directional location, as in *ku-mwanya kwa Kyala* 'to God in heaven'. The same locative distinctions are evident in Swahili, where the prefixes function both nominally and in agreement: class 16 *pa-* appears in *hapa pa-melimwa* 'here has been cultivated', class 17 *ku-* in *kule ku-melimwa* 'there has been cultivated', and class 18 *mu-* in *humu mu-meota magugu* 'in here there have been weeds'. These parallel patterns show that both languages employ the same locative class system, with consistent morphological marking and corresponding syntactic behaviour.

Synthesis of findings

The primary objective of this paper was to compare the morphological and semantic properties of nouns in Swahili and Nyakyusa. Starting with morphology, Nyakyusa nouns are composed of a pre-prefix, also called an augment, a prefix, and a stem. The pre-prefix in Nyakyusa involves a copy of the vowel found in the prefix. In contrast, Swahili nouns consist only of a prefix and a stem, without a pre-prefix. Additionally, Nyakyusa realises noun classes 12 and 13, which are not present in Swahili. Furthermore, the findings indicate that nasal sounds are diminishing as markers of Class 9 nouns in Swahili much more than in Nyakyusa. For instance, Swahili words such as *kuma* 'vagina', *pua* 'nose', *samaki* 'fish', *kuku* 'hen', and *simba* 'lion' are not marked by a nasal sound, whereas their Nyakyusa equivalents, *indutu*, *imbulu*, *inswi*, *inguku*, and *ingalama*, are marked with an initial nasal sound. These structural differences highlight the distinct morphological organisation of nouns in the two Bantu languages.

Regarding semantics, Swahili and Nyakyusa share certain properties while differing in others. In both languages, noun classes 1 and 2 are primarily used to refer to human beings. The Class 4 prefix *mi-* and the Class 5 prefix *li-* commonly convey a pejorative meaning accompanied by an augmentative sense in both languages, as illustrated by *i-miana* (Nyakyusa) and *mitoto* (Swahili), as well as *i-li-ana* (M31) and *litoto* (G2). Additionally, similarities and differences emerge in the assignment of other noun classes. The differences reflect language-specific semantic patterns and usage. This comparison demonstrates that while there is some overlap in meaning between the languages, each exhibits distinct semantic categorisations influenced by its morphological system.

For a more precise comparison between Nyakyusa and Swahili based on the semantic classification of noun classes, an attempt was made to examine the names of body parts, which are suggested to form part of a core (or basic) vocabulary list. This type of vocabulary is considered essential in determining genetic relationships among Bantu languages (Teeter, 1963; Campbell, 1987, 2017). Table 9 presents the comparison of the semantic properties of nouns between Swahili and Nyakyusa.

Table 9: A Comparison of Class Assignments of Body Parts Between Swahili and Nyakyusa

English	G42	G42	Class	M31	M31	Class
'eye/s'	*Jicho*	*macho*	5/6	*ilyaso*	*amaso*	5/6
'tooth/teeth'	*Jino*	*meno*	5/6	*iliino*	*amiino*	5/6
'buttock/s'	*Tako*	*matako*	5/6	*itanga*	*amatanga*	5/6
'knee/s'	*Goti*	*magoti*	5/6	*ifindo*	*amafundo*	5/6
'thigh/s'	*Paja*	*mapaja*	5/6	*ulutapatapa*	*indapatapa*	11/10
'nose/s'	*Pua*	*pua*	9	*imbulo*	*imbulo*	9
'vagina'	*kuma*	*kuma*	9	*indutu*	*indutu*	9
'penis'	*mboo*	*mboo*	9	*imbolo*	*imbolo*	9
'testicle/s'	*pumbu*	*mapumbu*	5/6	*indungu*	*indungu*	9
'mouth/s'	*mdomo*	*midomo*	3/4	*undomo*	*imilomo*	3/4
'hand/s'	*mkono*	*mikono*	3/4	*ikibhoko*	*ifibhoko*	7/8
'leg/s'	*mguu*	*miguu*	3/4	*ikilundi*	*ifilundi*	7/8
'back/s'	*mgongo*	*migongo*	3/4	*inyuma*	*inyuma*	9
'anus'	*mkundu*	*mikundu*	3/4	*ikinielo*	*ifinielo*	7/8
'head/s'	*kichwa*	*vichwa*	7/8	*untu*	*imitu*	3/4
'chest/s'	*Kifua*	*vifua*	7/8	*ikipambaga*	*ifipambaga*	7/8
'finger/s'	*kidole*	*vidole*	7/8	*ikyobhe*	*ifyobhe*	7/8
'wrist'	*kiuno*	*viuno*	7/8	*unsana*	*imisana*	3/4
'chin/s'	*kidevu*	*videvu*	7/8	*ikilefu*	*ifilefu*	7/8
'stomach/s'	*tumbo*	*matumbo*	5/6	*ulwanda*	*inyanda*	11/10
'cheek/s'	*shavu*	*mashavu*	5/6	*isaja*	*isaja*	9

Human body parts in both Swahili and Nyakyusa are systematically assigned to noun classes, ranging from 3 to 11. A comparison of the two languages shows that out of 21 body parts analysed, 11 are assigned to similar classes, representing a similarity of **52.3%**. However, notable differences emerge in the semantic assignment of the remaining body parts. For example, in Swahili, 5 out of 21 body parts are assigned to classes 3 and 4, while in Nyakyusa, only 3 fall into the corresponding classes. Classes 5 and 6 account for 8 body parts in Swahili, compared to 4 in Nyakyusa. In classes 7 and 8, Swahili assigns 5 body parts, whereas Nyakyusa assigns 6. For class 9, Swahili has 3 assignments, while Nyakyusa has double that number, 6. Finally, in classes 11 and 10, Swahili assigns none of the 21 body parts, whereas Nyakyusa assigns 2. These patterns indicate that while there is a moderate degree of overlap in class assignment between Swahili and Nyakyusa, the languages diverge in the specific semantic distribution of body parts across classes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparison of Swahili and Nyakyusa nouns reveals both shared Bantu heritage and clear language-specific developments in the noun morphology and semantics. Morphologically, Nyakyusa preserves a more complex nominal structure through the presence of a pre-prefix and the retention of additional noun classes and nasal class markers, whereas Swahili shows structural simplification and erosion of certain markers. Semantically, the two languages overlap in core human classifications and some evaluative meanings, yet diverge in the distribution of nouns across classes, as demonstrated by the moderate (52.3%) correspondence in body-part classification. These findings suggest that while the languages maintain a common typological foundation, each has evolved distinct patterns of noun-class organisation shaped by internal change and usage. Overall, the study underscores the value of detailed cross-linguistic comparison in understanding both genetic relationships and pathways of divergence within Bantu languages.

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