Contact-induced change in gender systems of northern Bantu languages

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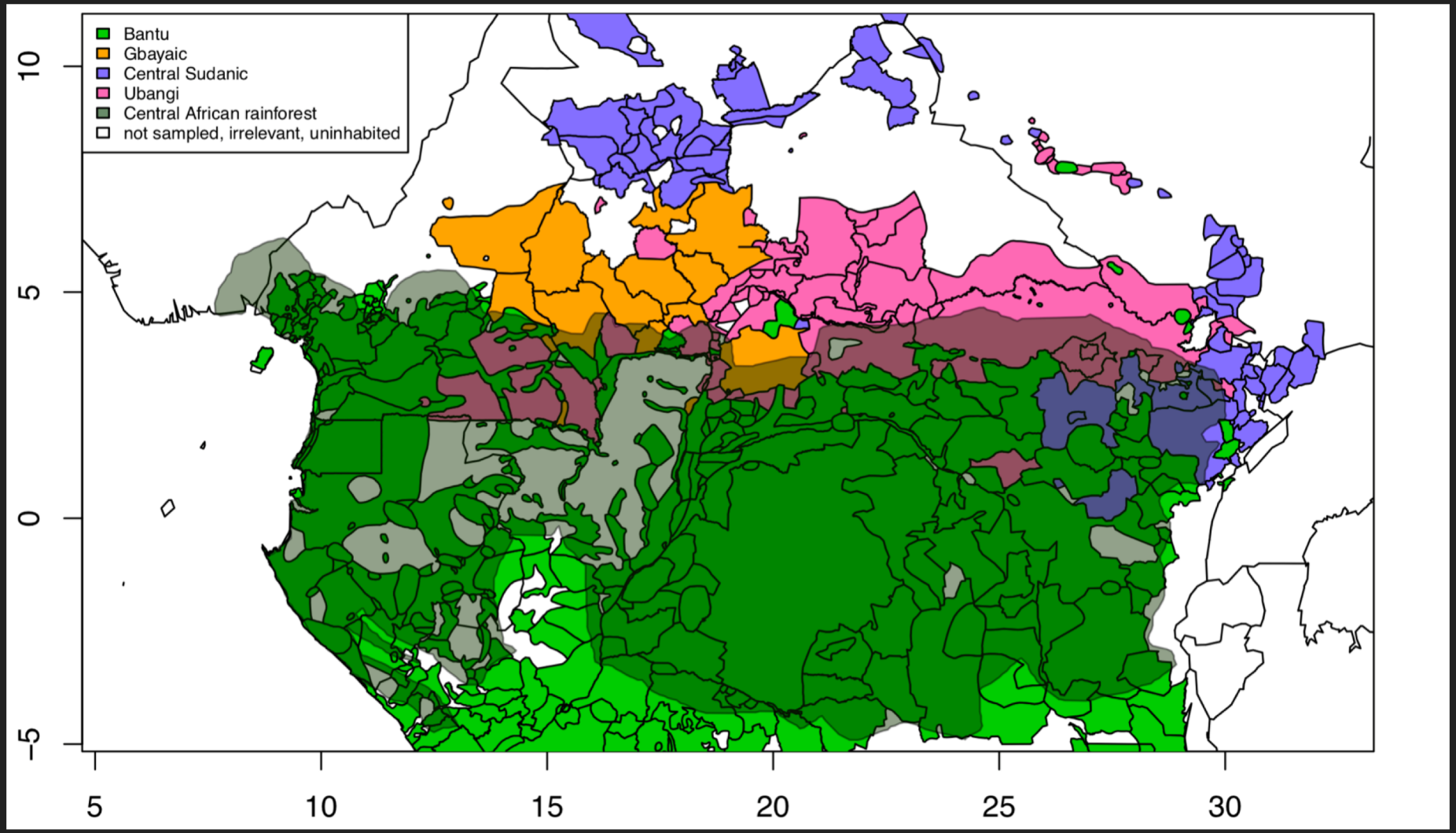
Outline

- Bantu gender and gender changes in the northern Bantu borderlands
- Survey of Bantu languages
- Survey of non-Bantu contact languages
- Discussion and conclusions

Introduction: Change in Bantu grammatical gender

- Bantu elaborate gender systems are well known and can be reconstructed for Proto-Bantu
  - Bantu gender profile: 8+ nominal and agreement classes, SG-PL pairings, human-nonhuman contrast
- Several Bantu languages of the northern Bantu borderlands exhibit heavily restructured and/or eroded systems of gender marking
- **Hypotheses**
  - restructuring in the northeastern Ituri rainforest is the result of a Pygmy substrate interference (Schebesta 1952; Vorbichler 1963)
  - restructuring is the result of contact influence from other neighboring non-Bantu languages


Bantu
Gbayaic
Central Sudanic
Ubangi
Central African rainforest
not sampled, irrelevant, uninhabited
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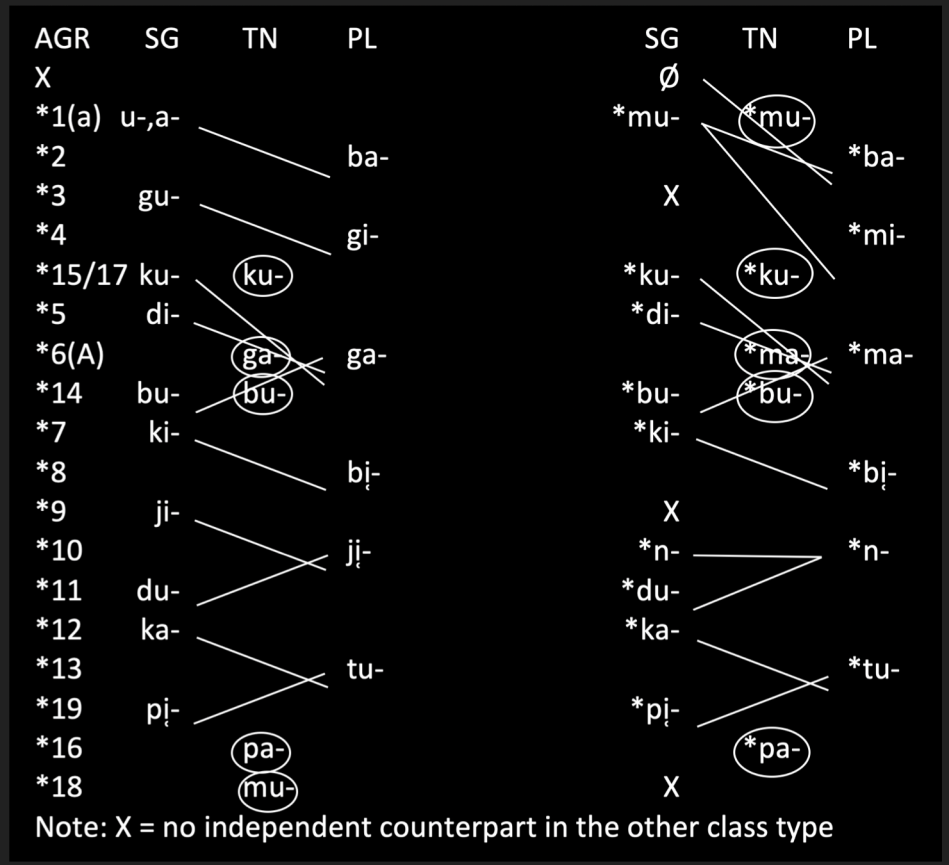
Introduction: Agreement (left) vs. noun marking (right) in Proto-Bantu



Gender systems in the northern rainforest: Bantu

- Two studies: Di Garbo & Verkerk (2021, revised) and Verkerk & Di Garbo (2021, under revision)
  - we investigate gender systems in a sample of 179 northwestern Bantu languages focusing on patterns of gender agreement (syntactic vs. semantic/animacy-based) and their socio-geographic correlates
- 4 types:
  - only syntactic agreement (Type 1, 122 languages)
  - both syntactic and animacy-based agreement (Type 2, 40 languages)
  - animacy-based gender (Type 3, 11 languages)
  - no agreement (Type 4, 6 languages)

Type 1: Only syntactic agreement - Bakole (A231, Asobo 1989: 89)

(a) Subject-verb agreement with an animate Class 1 noun

mw-ánà à mádà
CL1-child CL1 ate

'The child ate'.

(b) Subject-verb agreement with an animate Class 3

*mù-rò*ŋ*gi mú mádà*
CL3-sheep CL3 ate

'The sheep ate'.

Type 2: Syntactic & ani-based agreement - Lika (D201, de Wit 2015: 298-299)

(a) Animate singular

mu-kó *á-pʊng-á* *ndɪ* *ká-ĭnzɪnzíny-á*
1-woman 3SG.AN^{P}-start-FV^{P} P_3 9b-REFL-complain-FV
'The woman started to complain'

b Animate plural

ɓombŭ *ɓó-pik-og-o* *ɓa-ndáɓʊ* *na* *ɓe-nvunvú*
2-bird 3PL.AN-build-PL-FV 2-9.house with 2+9:9a-moss
'Birds build nests with moss.'[20]

(c) Inanimate singular

kpáká *kakí* *Ø-ká-ɓák-ag-ɪ-gˇʊ* *ndɪ*
9.trap 3SG.POSS 3SG/PL.INAN-NEG-sprout-PLUR-FV-NEG P_3
'His trap could not release.'

(d) Inanimate plural

ɓa-kpáká *kakí* *Ø-ká-ɓák-ag-ɪ-gˇʊ* *ndɪ*
2-9.trap 3SG-POSS 3SG/PL.INAN-NEG-sprout-PL-FV-NEG P_3
'His traps could not release.'

Type 2: Syntactic & ani-based agreement - Pagibete (C401, Reeder 1998: 54ff, 58)

- All animate nouns obligatorily take agreement in gender 1/2, i.e., they are semantically assigned to gender 1/2.
- Their nominal forms do not match class 1/2, which indicates that, before `moving to' gender 1/2, they used to be lexically assigned to different genders.
  - *babá* / *ba-babá* 'father/fathers'
  - *mbikɛ́ / ba-biká* 'visitor/visitors'
  - *e-bogó / be-bogó* 'wild ducks/ wild ducks'
- Inanimate nouns trigger syntactic agreement in their respective lexically-specified genders

Type 3: Animacy-based gender - Kako (A93, Ernst 1992: 36)

(a) *ɓè-ŋgo* *ɓa-ka* *tì* *ɗɔkɔ̀* *na.*
AN.PL-cochon AN.PL-DEM NEG grandir NEG
'Ces cochons ne sont pas grands.' ('These pigs are not big', own translation)

(b) *mɛ̀-kandɛ* *ma-ka* *ma* *lòlò.*
INAN.PL-habits INAN.PL-DEM déjà brûlé
'Ces habits sont brûlé.' ('These clothes are burnt', own translation)

Type 4: No gender - Polri (A92, Wega 2012: 129)

mù-ùtì	jʷɔ̂	"tout l'homme"
Sg homme	tout	
ɓò-ùtì	ɓɛ̀-jʷɔ̂	"tous les hommes"
Pl homme pl	tout	
ɓɛ̀-nɔ̌n	ɓɛ̀-jʷɔ̂	"tous les oiseaux"
Pl oiseau	Pl tous	
ɓɛ̀-ndʒɛ̀ɓɔ́	ɓɛ̀-jʷɔ̂	"toutes les maisons"
Pl maison	pl tous	

Bantu languages of the northern rainforest: socio-geographic correlates

- Animacy-based agreement is widespread in the larger northwestern Bantu area (attested in some form in 51 languages out of 179)
- Quantitative analyses show that solely animacy-based and fully eroded gender systems (Type 3 and 4) are most likely to be found in languages of wider communication or **bordering with Ubangi and Central Sudanic languages***

* We attempted to test the effect of historical contact with pre-Bantu ‘‘Pygmy’ populations, but the analyses did not yield as robust results, possibly due to poor variable design and general lack of data

Noun classification and animacy in Non-Bantu languages

- Güldemann (in prep.) investigates noun classification in non-Bantu languages of the northern rainforest transition (currently 32 languages from Central Sudanic (7), Gbayaic (7), and Narrow Ubangi (18))
- These languages were coded for the following features:
  - ‘behavioral animacy’ (= animacy-based differential grammatical marking in nominal morphosyntax, e.g. plural marking, choice of possessive linker)
  - ‘+/- animate contrast’ on pronouns
  - ‘+/- animate contrast’ on agreement targets beyond pronouns
  - agreement of the NC type with ‘+/- human contrast’

Behavioral animacy: Lese (Mangbutu-Efe, Central Sudanic)

- Goal postposition *-ni* with inanimates vs. *-ɓɔ* for animates (Vorbichler 1965: 90-1)

(1)

a. *mɛsà-ni*
table-IA.DIR
to/away from the table

b. *àfɔ̀-**ba**-ni*
father-at-IA.DIR
to/away from father

c. *àfa-ɓɔ*
father-A.DIR
to my father

d. *u̲ra-ɓɔ*
animal-A.DIR
to the animal (Vorbichler 1965: 90-1)

Behavioral animacy and +/- animate pronominal gender: Mono (Bandaic, Narrow Ubangi)

- various types of behavioral animacy: e.g plural marking (by prefix *à-/àlà-*) is restricted to animate nouns or their quality attributes (Kamanda Kola 2003: 180, 247-259, 281-2, 288-9)
- 3rd-person pronouns distinguish animacy and number (Kamanda Kola 2003: 269-79, 443-7)

Figure 2: The animacy-based pronominal gender system of Mono (Kamanda K. 2003)

> attested in a similar fashion in other Bandaic languages

+/- Animate contrast on pronouns: Gbayaic

((2) ’Buli (Southern)

a. *ʔà* *gàsá*
3SG.A be.big
S/he is big.

b. *yò* *gàsá*
3SG.IA be.big
It is big. (Moñino 1995: 98)

(3) Yaayuwee (Western, Northwest)

a. *ʔám zɔ̀ká ʔà*
1SG see 3SG.A
I have seen him/her.

b. *ʔám zɔ̀káà*
1SG see:3SG.IA
I have seen it. (Moñino 1995: 65)

(4) Gbeya (Western, Bokoto-Gbeya)

a. *ɗŏŋ-ʔå̀* [ɗòŋǻà]
back-3SG.A
his/her back ~ behind him/her

b. *ɗŏŋ-à* [ɗòŋǻà]
back-3SG.IA
its back ~ after it (Moñino 1995: 169)

Niger-Congo type gender AND animacy: Mbaic

Language	Ndunga	Mba	Dongo	Ma
Niger-Congo type noun inflection	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Niger-Congo type gender	±human	±human	±animate	-
Pronominal gender	±human	±animate	±animate	±animate

Note: frame = typical for Niger-Congo, shading = untypical for Niger-Congo

Table 1: Overview of noun classification in Mbaic

Exceptional co-occurrence of a) Niger-Congo gender system with original +/- human contrast and b) areally typical pronominal gender system with original +/- animate contrast

The Pygmy forager languages

Four basic types:

1. No sign of animate gender, limited behavioral animacy: only Non-Bantu, notably Efe (Mangbutu-Efe), Asua (Mangbetu-Asua)
2. Typical Bantu gender system without animate agreement and behavioral animacy: e.g. Bongwe (B303) (Walker 1937)
3. Typical Bantu gender system but many non-human animates agree like human nouns: e.g. Gyeli (A801) (Grimm 2015: 128)
4. Bipartite animacy-based gender system: e.g., in Bantu Kango aka “Mbuti” (D311) (Vorbichler 1968: 412-5)

All situations are inconspicuous regarding closest Non-Pygmy variety!!!

Discussion

The northern rainforest-savannah transition in Central Africa shows a clear bias toward animacy-based noun classification, recurrently conveyed by a gender system restricted to pronominal targets. This is:

- certainly innovative in Bantu
- not deeply entrenched in Central Sudanic
- widespread in Ubangi and Gbayaic, with some possible reconstructions
- variable in Pygmy varieties - aligned with relevant farmer language

> positive evidence for contact interference in Bantu but not clearly for a particular Pygmy forager substrate

Back to Bantu

Necessary distinction between two types of gender restructuring that are in principle independent of each other:

a) semantic reorganization from ±human to ±animacy (possibly, but not necessarily, involves spread of animacy-based agreement)

b) reduction~erosion of gender inventory

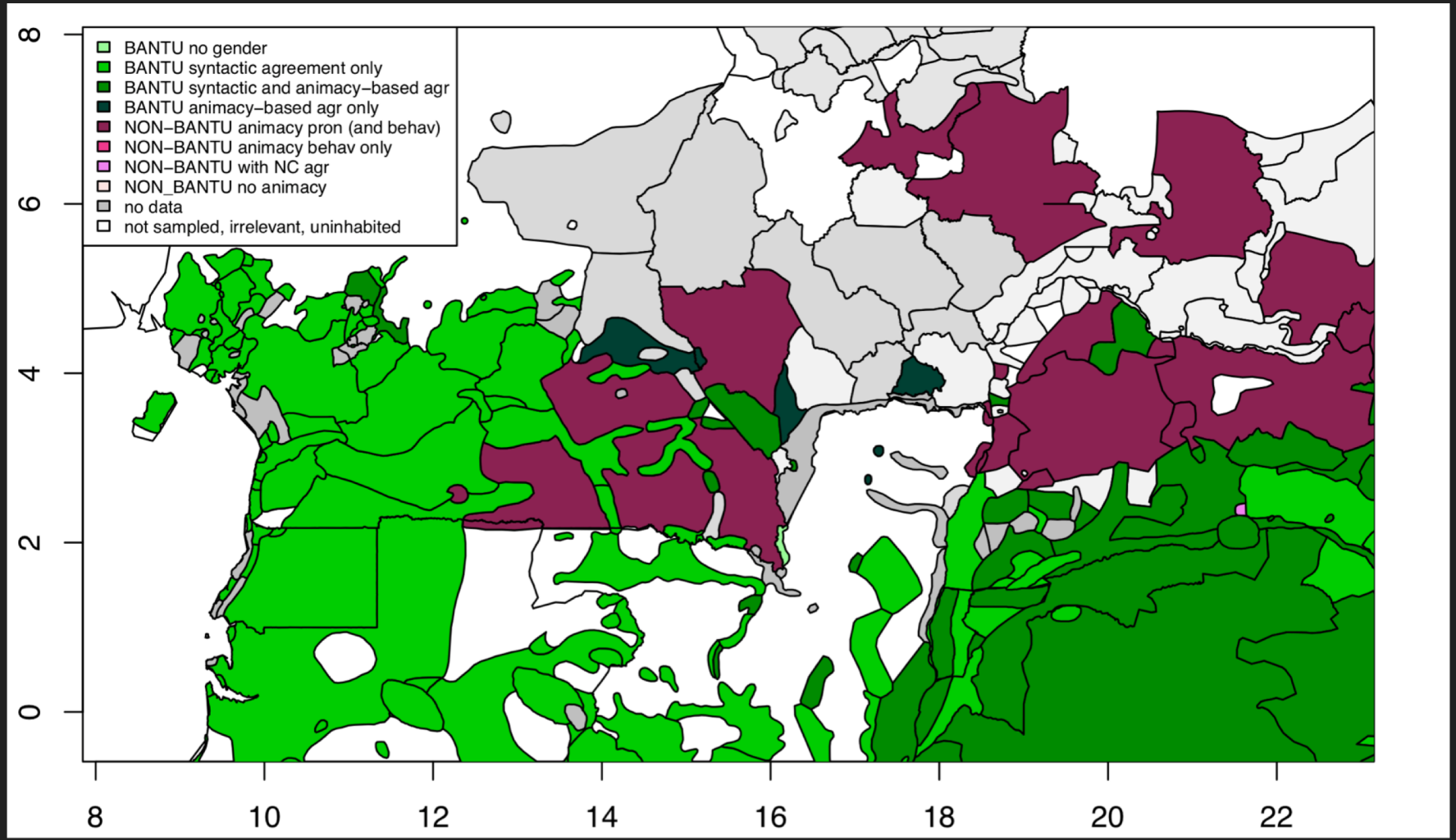
Back to Bantu

Changes			Gender according to ±animacy	
			NO	YES
Gender erosion	NO		Inherited default	Pagibeete, Ngombe, etc.
	YES	To Bipartite	Nzadi	Lingala, Beeke, etc.
		Complete	Yansi, Kituba	?Bɔdo, Huma, Bokuru

Table 2: Bantu languages and two types of gender restructuring

+ languages in right table column correlate robustly with areal proximity to Non-Bantu languages with animacy-based noun classification (particularly Gbayaic and Ubangi) where contact-induced restructuring has a robust and recurrent target of change

> semantic shift seems to precede drastic erosion of gender inventory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BANTU syntactic agreement only
BANTU syntactic and animacy−based agr
BANTU animacy−based agr only
NON−BANTU animacy pron (and behav)
NON−BANTU animacy behav only
NON−BANTU with NC agr
NON_BANTU no animacy
no data
not sampled, irrelevant, uninhabited
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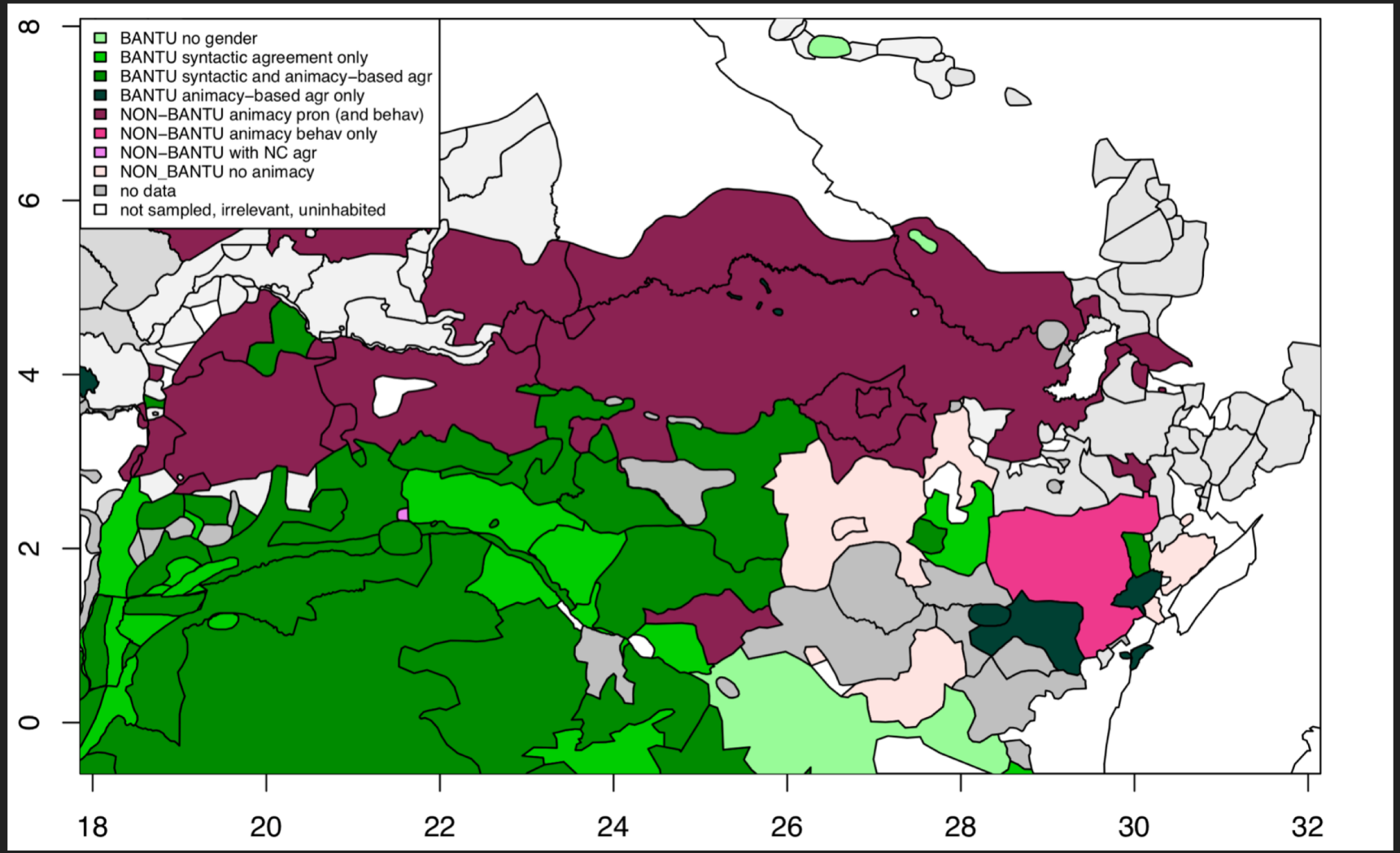
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Back to Bantu

- Radically animacy-based and some completely eroded systems occur in languages that are spoken close to non-Bantu languages with animacy-based nominal classification
- This areal effect can be observed both through large-scale quantitative studies (Verkerk and Di Garbo 2021, under revision) and through the qualitative analyses presented here.
- We plan to study this further, expanding the current sample, and conducting analogous comparative studies beyond the northern rainforest area.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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