

THE MBOSHI NOUN CLASS SYSTEM

Patricia L. Bedrosian

S.I.L., Congo

This article presents a description of the noun class system in Mboshi, a Bantu C language spoken in Congo. The dialect Embosi (classified C.25) is analyzed. First, an overview of the language and a comparison with Proto-Bantu is presented. The article establishes an underlying concord marker that coordinates the Mboshi noun class morphemes in the noun phrase in which it operates. The concord morphemes and structures described in this article include demonstratives, verbal prefixes, adjectives, modifying structures, interrogatives, quantifiers, numerals and the pronouns. Concordial morphemes consist of combinations of a class concord marker and a morpheme base which include both segment and tone. Some morpheme bases exist only as a tone. The article discusses the accommodation of loan words and personal names into the Mboshi noun class system. The classification of a noun into a class is motivated both by the phonemic realization of the noun prefix and by the semantics of the noun. Finally, Mboshi noun class genders are presented and their general semantics are discussed.

Cet article présente une description du système de classes nominales en mboshi, langue bantoue du groupe C parlée au Congo. Il s'agit ici du dialecte embosi (C25). On commence par un exposé général de la langue, suivi d'une comparaison avec le proto-bantoue. On propose ensuite un marqueur d'accord sous-jacent qui co-ordonne les morphèmes de classe nominale dans le SN où il opère. Les morphèmes et les structures d'accord présentés ici comprennent démonstratifs, préfixes verbaux, adjectifs, structures concordantes, interrogatifs, quantificateurs, numéraux et pronoms. Les morphèmes d'accord consistent en la combinaison d'un marqueur d'accord de classe et d'un morphème de base comprenant à la fois segment et ton. On discute en outre la manière dont les mots d'emprunt et les anthroponymes s'accommodent au système de classe de la langue. La répartition des substantifs parmi les diverses classes s'effectue d'un part selon les phonèmes de leur élément initial, et d'autre part selon leur valeur sémantique. On termine par une discussion des couplages de classes en 'genres' et de leur traits sémantiques généraux.

0. INTRODUCTION

Speakers of Mboshi live primarily in the Cuvette region of central Congo. Approximately 170,000 speakers are included in the Mboshi language group. This group includes at least 7 distinct dialects that are classified under Guthrie's C.20 Bantu language group. About 10,000 of these people speak the Embosi dialect primarily spoken in Boundji (Robbins and Robbins 1987a). This article describes and discusses the noun class system of the Mboshi of Boundji that is classified by Guthrie as Bantu C.25 (Guthrie 1970).¹

Data was collected on a one-to-one basis by using an active bilingual approach (French/Mboshi) with native Mboshi speakers.² Data collection was done both by collecting nouns in isolation and in sentences. This study included 1,956 nouns.

1. LANGUAGE OVERVIEW

1.1 SEGMENTS

Vowels. Mboshi has a seven vowel system as follows: a e e i o o u. Long vowels are written as two separate vowels in this article. The two-vowel convention is supported by the fact that contour tones only occur on long vowels or on short vowels after a vowel has been elided.

(1) [ebā:] → ebàà
wall wall

¹ I would like to thank Stephen C. Anderson, David Morgan, Larry and Cami Robbins, and Ken Wesche for their encouragement and valuable help with the analysis and organization of this article. I would also like to thank the Congolese government for permitting me to work on this interesting language.

² This work would not have been possible without the help of my two language assistants, Louis Ossoa and Jean de Dieu de Noel Elondabare. Both are native Mboshi speakers who were born in Boundji and lived there until they left in their mid-twenties to attend the university in Brazzaville, the capital of Congo, where they currently live.

Consonants. The consonants in Mboshi are represented by the characters in (2).

(2)	bilabial	labio-dental	alveolar	alveo-palatal	velar
stop	p b		t d		k
fricative	β	f	s		
affricate		pf bv	ts dz		
nasal	m		n	ɲ	
prenasal stop	mb	mv	nd		ng
prenasal affricate			nz		
liquid					
lateral			l		
flapped			r		
glide				y	w

In spoken Mboshi, word-final elision (apocope) occurs frequently. This is particularly true when the final vowel in a word precedes a noun class prefix. In this article, the data will be represented in its fullest form.

1.2 TONE

Mboshi has lexical high and low level tones. Sequences of unlike tones appear as rising and falling contour tones on surface structures through vowel elision and long vowels. In this article, tone glides will be represented by two separate level tones on adjacent vowels.

1.3 SENTENCE CONSTITUENT ORDER AND CONCORD

Mboshi is a SVO language. All constituents in the nominal phrase agree with the lexical head. Verbal prefixes also concord (agree) with the lexical head of the subject. Mboshi has prepositions and adverbs. Negative words are usually sentence final.³

(3) ngòngó	yà	ò-tíísì	á-tàà	nzòì	sá	kò
cl1^antelope	cl1^AM	cl1^AP-little	cl1-saw	cl1a^elephant	in	forest
The little antelope saw the elephant in the forest.						

2. NOUN CLASS SYSTEM

Mboshi has 12 noun classes. Each class possesses a set of concord morphemes and prefixes that distinguishes it from the other classes (see the table in (4)). It should be noted that though the morphemes for classes 9 and 10 are identical except for the numeral prefixes, the two classes are considered separate classes. Class 9 is singular and pairs with class 6, whereas class 10 is the plural pair for class 11. As mentioned, the morphemes and prefixes in a nominal phrase take their lead from the class of the head noun. Constituents in the nominal phrase that are affected by the head noun include: demonstratives, adjectives, modifying nouns, relative pronouns, numerals, quantifiers, and the third-person pronoun. Verbs are affected by the subject noun. Concordial morphemes consist of combinations of a class concord marker and a morpheme base. Some morpheme bases only consist of a tone. Mboshi has no locative classes.

³ Abbreviations in this article: 1, 2, 3: first-, second-, third-person; s/sg: singular; p/pl: plural; cl: noun class; AM: associative marker; AP: adjective prefix; AUX: auxiliary verb 'to be'; C: consonant; CM: concord marker; COP: copula; DEM: demonstrative; DIST: distal; H: high tone; INTR: interrogative; L: low tone; N: homorganic nasal; NUM: numeral; PB: Proto-Bantu; PRO: pronoun; PROX: proximal; QUAN: quantifier; REL: relative pronoun; SM: subject marker; V: vowel; Ø: null morpheme or segment; α/β: agreement/concord.

This analysis follows the pairing system generally used for Bantu languages where the odd numbered classes are singular and even numbered classes are plural. The majority of singular nouns pair with the next sequential class (1(a)/2, 3/4, 5/6, 7/8) except for the pairs 9/6 and 11/10. Class 14, which only contains a few remnant singular nouns, does not consistently pair with a specific class. Non-count nouns exist both in singular and plural classes with the majority falling into singular classes (see §5, the tables in (37) and (38)).

The table in (4) displays these classes and their concordial morphemes, and is laid out in the following manner: the class number, the concord marker, the noun prefixes, the demonstratives, the perfective subject marker (SM1), the imperfective subject marker (SM2), the present copula subject marker (SM3), the adjective prefix, the associative marker, the relative, the interrogative adjective, the quantifier, the numeral prefix, and the third-person substitutive pronoun. The tone for each morpheme is indicated above the column (H/L means low on class 1, high on the other classes). These morphemes will be discussed and exemplified.

(4) Class prefixes and concordial morphemes

Cl No.	CM tone →	noun prefix L	DEM prox H	dist HH	SM 1 H	2 HL	3 H/L	AP L	AM H/L	REL HH/LL	INTR L	QUAN H	NUM (1-5) L	H	PRO HL/L
1	wò	ò	wò-	wúú	á-	làá-	à	ò-	yà	yèè-	wò	ó-	sg ò-	pl	wà-
1a		Ø-(N)													
2	bá-	à-	bá	béé	á-	báà-	á	à-	bá	báá-	bà	á-	á-		bàá
3	mú-	ò-	mú	múú	ó-	móò-	ó-	ò-	má	móó-	mù	ó-	ò-		múà
4	mí-	ì-	mí	míf	í-	míí-	í-	ì-	má	míf-	mì	í-	í-		míà
5	dí-	ì-	dí	díf	í-	líí-	í-	ì-	lá	líí-	dì	í-	ì-		díà
6	má-	à-	má	méé	á-	máà-	á-	à-	má	máá-	mà	á-	á-		máà
7	yé-	è-	yé	yíf	é-	yéè-	é	è-	yá	yéé-	yè	é-	è-		yáà
8	bí-	ì-	bí	bíf	í-	bíí-	í	ì-	bá	bíf-	bì	í-	í-		bíà
9	yé-	Ø-(N)	yé	yíf	é-	yéè-	é	è-, N-	yá	yéé-	yè	é-	è-		yáà
10	yé-	Ø-(N)	yé	yíf	é-	yéè-	é	è-, N-	yá	yéé-	yè	é-	é-		yáà
		N-											Ø-		
11	dí-	lè-	dí	díf	í-	líí-	í-	ì-	lá	líí-	dì	í-	ì-		díà
14	bú-	Ø-	bú	búú	ó-	bóò-	ó	ò-	bá	bóó-	bù	ó-	ò-		búà
		bv-													

Some of the noun prefixes in classes 1, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 10 have additional surface forms that are not shown on the table. The generation of these surface forms from underlying forms will be discussed in §3.

As a result of vowel harmony, the /e/ in prefixes le- and e- can surface either as e' or /e/, and the prefix o- surfaces with variants /o/ and /ɔ/. Vowel harmony is not discussed in this article.

The table in (5) displays a comparison of Proto-Bantu (Meeussen 1967:98) and Mboshi prefixes.

(5) Proto-Bantu and Mboshi noun prefixes

Class	Proto-Bantu	Mboshi	
		most frequent forms	infrequent forms
1	mù-	ò-	mù-
1a		Ø-(N)	
2	bà-	à-	b-
3	mù-	ò-	mù-
4	mì-	ì-	mì-
5	ì-	ì-, Ø-	dì-
6	mà-	à-	m-
7	kì-	è-	
8	bì-	ì-	b-
9	N-	Ø-(N)	
10	N-	Ø-(N)	N-
11	dù-	lè-	
14	bù-	Ø-	bv-

Note: Welmers (1973) transcribes the prefixes for classes 1 and 3 as **mo-** and for class 7 as **ke-**.

Consonant deletion. In the majority of the classes, Mboshi has deleted the Proto-Bantu noun prefix consonant and has preserved the prefix vowel as seen in the table in (5). This includes the nasal consonants in the PB nasal classes 1, 3, 4, and 6 as well. In present-day Mboshi, prefix consonant deletion usually occurs before consonant initial noun roots. However, in the list of nouns for this study, four cases in class 1 and ten cases in class 3 kept the residual **mu-** form before a consonant initial root. These residual forms are probably able to maintain their archaic forms due to the high frequency of their occurrence in regular speech.

Vowel deletion. Occurring less frequently is the loss of the vowel in the noun prefix. In classes 2, 6, and 8, the consonant has been preserved in a minority of nouns, but the vowel has been deleted. This prefix vowel deletion occurs before vowel-initial noun roots. Since this phenomenon occurs infrequently, this analysis considers these as infrequent forms that take on a different surface form (see the morphophonological derivations in §3.2).

Complete prefix deletion. In nasal classes 1a, 9, and 10, the nouns have lost the nasal prefix altogether or the nasal prefixes were lost as prefixes, but have been lexicalized and fused to the noun root. It should be noted that in four cases in class 10, a residual Proto-Bantu N- prefix appears that is lost in the singular form and is not a part of the noun root. Classes 5 and 14 have occurrences where the noun prefix has been entirely deleted.

3. NOUN CLASS CONCORDIAL MORPHEMES

3.1 CONCORD MARKER

As in many Bantu noun class systems, the Mboshi concord marker appears in all the concordial morphemes and serves as the base by which the other concordial morphemes are structured. The concord marker never occurs as such, but combines with other vowel and tone morphemes to form the various concordial morphemes for each class. The concord marker itself consists of CV structure and has high tone except class

1 which has low tone. In Mboshi, the low-tone class 1 concord marker is consistent and the high-tone class 9 concord marker is inconsistent with most Bantu languages where both these classes have low-tone concords. Tone on the concordial morphemes are partially determined by the noun class concord marker and partially determined by the grammatical morpheme base. As seen in the noun prefixes, the concord marker can appear without the concord consonant or tone. The phrasal constituents that take a noun class concord marker are presented and discussed below. In some of these, the concord marker has been lost entirely.

As can be seen in the tables in (4) and (5), Mboshi nasal classes 3, 4, and 6 have retained Proto-Bantu nasal concords *mu-*, *mi-*, and *ma-*, respectively. In general, these nasals are lost in the concordial prefixes, but remain in the free concordial morphemes (e.g., the demonstrative morpheme, the associative morpheme, the interrogative morpheme). In the remaining nasal classes (1, 9, and 10), there is no nasal concord marker, but a nasal surfaces in the adjective prefix and class 10 numerals.

3.2 NOUN PREFIXES

Most classes have more than one of the following prefix forms: CV, C, V, and null prefix (no prefix). Classes 1 and 5 have the most variation with three possibilities. Classes 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 have both a consonant and a vowel prefix. The nasal classes 9 and 10 have the null prefix that may be followed by a root-initial homorganic nasal consonant. Class 7 only has the vowel prefix; and class 11 only has a CV. Obenga notes that noun prefix occurrence in Mboshi is a conditioned one: the V and null prefixes occur before roots beginning with a consonant and the C prefixes only occur before roots beginning with a vowel (Obenga 1976). However, CV prefixes occur before either vowels or consonants, but will change their surface form depending on their environment. The majority of noun prefixes are vowel prefixes that have deleted the concord marker consonant. All vowel noun prefixes occur with a low tone (see (5)). Some examples of prefix variation are seen in (6).

(6) ò-yùrù cl1-woman/girl	à-yùrù cl2-women/girls
Ø-tsésì cl1a-gazelle	à-tsésì cl2-gazelles
mù-ánà cl1-child	b-ánà cl2-children
dì-àngé (dzàngé) cl5-court	m-àngé cl6-courts
ì-bàà cl5-liver	à-bàà cl6-livers
Ø-kànzà cl5-shed	à-kànzà cl6-sheds

Class 1a. The null prefix in class 1a has been classified as a subclass of class 1 (Welmers 1973:163–64). The concord morphemes are identical with class 1 but differ only by the absence of a noun prefix. Semantically, subclass 1a with nasal roots include only animals with few exceptions. This semantic peculiarity differs from the *o-* prefix nouns in class 1 that contain entirely human reference nouns (further discussion in §7).

Morphophonological derivations. As was mentioned earlier, some of the noun prefixes take on different surface forms depending on their environments. In the derivations below, tone is deleted along with the vowel that carries it. As far as can be

observed, the tone never resurfaces elsewhere. The various derivations involve the following:

Class 1 and 3. The underlying form for the surface CV prefix is analyzed as mù-, a residual from the PB form. In a few cases, prefix vowel deletion occurs in predicable environments.

- (7) /u/ → Ø /##m____#V
[+round]

mù-órò → m-órò
cl1-person

Classes 4 and 5. The underlying form for the C prefixes are analyzed as mì- for class 4 and dī- for class 5, also residual forms from Proto-Bantu which have different surface forms in a conditioned environment. Prefix vowel deletion occurs as in (8).

- (8) /i/ → Ø /##C____#/i/

mì-ia → m-ia
cl4-fire

Class 5. Again the underlying form for the C and CV prefixes are analyzed as dī-. This is also seen as a Proto-Bantu residual which changes in predictable environments.

- (9) [d] → [dz] /##____/i/#V

/i/ → Ø /##[dz]____V#

dī-élè → dz-élè
cl5-sand

Class 9 and 10. The nasal prefix has become lexicalized and fused to the noun root. It is also observed that nasal initial roots with a Ø- prefix do not occur in non-nasal classes. In general, only a relatively few root-initial nasal consonants occur in both nouns and verbs in Mboshi. For this article, the N is considered fused to the root except for four cases in class 10 in which a residual Proto-Bantu N- prefix appears that is lost in the singular form and is not a part of the noun root. The Ø- prefix also occurs before a non-nasal voiceless root consonants that do not cluster with a nasal (s t ts k p pf). In these environments, it is possible that the homorganic nasal consonant is prohibited to fuse with the root and is deleted by a general phonological rule. Some examples would include (10).

- (10) Ø-kási Ø-tsálá
cl10-leaves cl10-feathers

Ø-kúǂá Ø-pèmbá
cl9-garden cl9-nose

Tone. Noun prefixes carry low tone except the null prefixes which do not carry tone. The prefix vowel tones, through elision, will be affected by the tone of the previous vowel.⁴ In the case of null prefixes, there is no evidence of influence from tones carried by the preceding vowels nor evidence of a floating tone surfacing as a result of the lost prefix.

⁴ Vowel and tone elision in Mboshi is not discussed in this article. Fontaney discusses elision when vowels and tones are in contact in her article on Mboshi spoken in Olee and Boundji, Congo (Fontaney 1988).

3.3 DEMONSTRATIVE STRUCTURES

Two types of demonstratives are used in Mboshi. These demonstratives are distinguished by the proximity of the object to the speaker. One demonstrative morpheme is used to designate objects that are perceived as close and another for objects that are perceived as further away from the speaker. The demonstrative morpheme concords with the head noun and generally follows the head noun:

noun[α -cl] + *DEM*[α -cl]

Near demonstrative (proximal) structures. The near demonstrative is represented by the concord marker CV syllable but always has high tone. Thus, the near demonstrative morpheme base consists of a high tone which determines the tone of the near demonstrative word.

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| (11) | m-òrò | wó | à-yùrù | bá |
| | cl1-person | cl1 ^{DEM} PROX | cl2-women | cl2 ^{DEM} PROX |
| | this person | | these women | |
| | mù-érì | mú | mì-érì | mí |
| | cl3-star | cl3 ^{DEM} PROX | cl4-stars | cl4 ^{DEM} PROX |
| | this star | | these stars | |
| | dí-sì | dí | mí-sì | má |
| | cl5-eye | cl5 ^{DEM} PROX | cl6-eyes | cl6 ^{DEM} PROX |
| | this eye | | these eyes | |

In order to further distinguish and emphasize a noun, the same demonstrative morpheme is placed before the noun:

DEM [α -cl] + *noun* [α -cl]

The semantic idea in this form focuses one's attention on the specific object so that there is no mistake as to what is being pointed out.

- | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| (12) | wó | m-òrò | bá | à-yùrù |
| | cl1 ^{DEM} PROX | cl1-person | cl2 ^{DEM} PROX | cl2-women |
| | this man here | | these women here | |

Far demonstrative (distal) structure. The far demonstrative word is formed by combining the concord marker with a high tone (as in the near demonstrative) and the vowel /-i/. Assimilating to the /-i/, the concord vowel goes through vowel raising. Then the demonstrative morpheme /-i/ undergoes complete regressive assimilation both in vowel and tone to form a raised lengthened vowel with high-high tone. Thus, the morphophonemic rule ordering is given in (13).

- (13) 1. $V \rightarrow V / \text{##C} __ / i / \#$
 [<-high>] [< +high >]
 [+low] [-low]
2. $/i/ \rightarrow V / \text{##C} V __ \#$
 [α] [α]

These rules give the following results: $\acute{u} + i = \acute{u}\acute{u}$; $\acute{o} + i = \acute{u}\acute{u}$; $\acute{í} + i = \acute{í}\acute{í}$; $\acute{é} + i = \acute{í}\acute{í}$; $\acute{á} + i = \acute{é}\acute{é}$. Some examples are given in (14).

- | | | | | |
|------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| (14) | m-òrò | wúú | a-tsésì | béé |
| | cl1-person | cl1 ^{DEM} DIST | cl2-gazelles | cl2 ^{DEM} DIST |
| | that person | | those gazelles | |

ò-kólò múú
cl3-blouse cl3^DEM^DIST
that blouse

ì-tàà díí
cl5-tadpole cl5^DEM^DIST
that tadpole

è-síβì yíí
cl7-antelope cl7^DEM^DIST
that antelope

lè-mbíà díí
cl11-palmnut cl11^DEM^DIST
that palmnut

ì-kàsì mífí
cl4-bridges cl4^DEM^DIST
those bridges

à-tàà méeé
cl6-tadpoles cl6^DEM^DIST
those tadpoles

ì-síβì bíí
cl8-antelopes cl8^DEM^DIST
those antelopes

bv-àngà búú
cl14-dance cl14^DEM^DIST
those dances

3.4 ASSOCIATIVE STRUCTURES

In this construction, the associative marker links the noun with another constituent to form a relationship. This phrase structure is used for nouns modified by nouns, possessives, or adjectives. The associative marker consists of the class concord marker plus /-a/. In all the classes, the concord marker vowel elides out but retains the concord tone.⁵ Class 1 yà is the exception where the low tone is the only realization of the concord marker.

Nouns and possessives modifying nouns. In this case, the modifying or possessive noun follows the head noun with the associative joining them together to form a noun phrase. The associative concords with the head noun, not the modifier nor possessor nouns. The noun phrases in (15) use:

head noun[a-cl] + AM[a-cl] + {modifier, possessor} noun

(15) mù-ènè yà tsèngè
cl1-chief cl1^AM cl9^land
the land chief

lè-bòngì lá ò-yólò
cl11-fog cl11^AM cl3-morning
morning fog

mù-ánà yà lui
cl1-child cl1^AM Louis
Louis' child

è-wómbò yá bísí
cl7-broom cl7^AM 1p^PRO
our broom

ndàé yá ngá
cl9^appointment cl9^AM 1s^PRO
my appointment

bv-ùsò bá nzàì
cl14-snout cl14^AM cl1^elephant
elephant trunk

à-làì má í-tssí
cl6-wine cl6^AM cl5-marriage
the marriage wine

b-ánà bá lui
cl2-children cl2^AM Louis
Louis' children

ìwómbò bá bísí
cl8^brooms cl8^AM 1p^PRO
our brooms

nzónzi yá bíní
cl10^fingernails cl10^AM 2p^PRO
your fingernails

Adjectives modifying nouns. There are few true adjectives in Mboshi. Certain words are distinguished as adjectives (as opposed to nouns) because they do not have their own prefix, but have concord prefixes. The six words in (16) are the few adjectives in Mboshi.

⁵ In many young speakers of Mboshi, the associative morpheme consonant also drops and leaves only the *á* or *à* (in the case of class 1).

- | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| (16) -bvè | good | -tíísí | little | -kúlú | short |
| -bé | bad | -nè | big | -làá | long |

Adjectives that directly modify the head noun of a noun phrase are structured much the same way as the other structures above using the associative morpheme:

head noun [α-cl] + AM [α-cl] + adjective [α-cl]

Again, the noun being modified is the head followed by its concordial associative morpheme and adjective whose prefix also agrees with the head noun (see §3.5). The adjective prefixes are represented in their non-elided forms in (17).

- | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---------|------------|-------------------|---------|------------|
| (17) ò-yésíí | yà | ò-nè | à-yúrù | bá | à-tíísí |
| cl1-teacher | cl1^AM | cl1-big | cl2-women | cl2^AM | cl2-little |
| the fat teacher | | | the little women | | |
| à-júíní | má | à-bé | mbíà | yá | mvé |
| cl6-wispers | cl6^AM | cl6-bad | cl10^palmnuts | cl10^AM | cl10^good |
| the bad rumors | | | the good palmnuts | | |
| bv-ùs̀s̀ | bá | ò-kúlú | lè-mbíà | lá | ì-bvé |
| cl14-snout | cl14^AM | cl14-short | cl11-palmnut | cl11^AM | cl11-good |
| the short animal snout | | | the good palmnut | | |

Vowel and tonal elision are extremely common in this structure and appear to be obligatory in speech.

- | | | | | | |
|---------------|--------|-----------|---|-------|---------------------|
| (18) ìsíbì | bá | ìtíísí | → | ìsíbì | b-ítíísí |
| cl8^antelopes | cl8^AM | cl8^small | | | the small antelopes |

3.5 ADJECTIVE PREFIXES

Syntactically, an adjective can directly modify a noun (associative structure) or it can be used as a complement in a copulative verbal phrase. In either case, the adjective must agree with the noun it modifies. In plurals, some adjectives undergo reduplication. This reduplication in plurals does not seem to be affected by semantics nor by the degree of emphasis as it is in singular nouns. It appears as though some adjectives agree with the plurality of the noun by duplicating.

Morphologically, the adjective prefix directly corresponds with the vowel of the concord marker but has a low tone. In class 14, the adjective prefix surfaces as a lowered concord vowel. This lowering of the concord vowel in class 14 occurs throughout the concordial prefixes (see (4)). In classes 9 and 10 there are two variable prefixes, è- and N-. As mentioned earlier (§3.2) nasals are prohibited to cluster with root consonants /s t s k p pf/. In these environments, the prefix è- is used. However, the N- seems to be the preferred prefix when allowed.

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|--------------------|---------|------------|
| (19) ò-kólò | má | ò-làá | ì-kólò | má | ì-làá-ìlàá |
| cl3-blouse | cl3^AM | cl3-long | cl4-blouses | cl4^AM | cl4-long |
| the long blouse | | | the long blouses | | |
| mià | é-dí | m-bè/è-bè | mbéé | é-dí | è-kúlú |
| cl10^shotgun | cl10-COP | cl10-bad | cl9^pipe | cl9-COP | cl9-short |
| The shotguns are bad. | | | The pipe is short. | | |

When the adjective follows a copula and modifies the head noun (subject), the prefix must still agree with the head noun. The concordance becomes:

head noun [α-cl] + COP [α-cl] + adjective [α-cl]

- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|
| (20) ò-kólò | ó-dí | ò-kúlú | mbfà | é-dí | m-bvè (mbè) |
| cl3-blouse | cl3-COP | cl3-short | cl10^palmnuts | cl10-COP | cl10-good |
| The blouse is short. | | | The palmnuts are good. | | |
| m-òrò | á-dí | ò-tíísí | mbfà | é-dí | è-bvè |
| cl1-person | cl1-COP | cl1-little | cl10^palmnuts | cl10-COP | cl10-good |
| The person (man) is little. | | | The palmnuts are good. | | |
| ì-síì | í-dí | ì-tíísí | | | |
| cl8-antelopes | cl8-COP | cl8-little | | | |
| The antelopes are little. | | | | | |

3.6 INTERROGATIVE

The interrogative here refers to what is often labeled as the interrogative adjective, 'what' or 'which'. The interrogative morpheme is represented by a low tone. The interrogative consists of a low tone morpheme that combines with the CV concord marker syllable. In speech, the low tone distinguishes it from the near demonstrative morpheme which carries a high tone. No vowel lengthening nor tone variation occurs in this structure. The noun being interrogated determines the class with an agreeing interrogative word to form:

noun [α-cl] + interrogative [α-cl]

- | | | | |
|--------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| (21) m-òrò | wò | à-yúrù | bà |
| cl1-person | cl1^INTR | cl2-women | cl2^INTR |
| Which person? | | Which women? | |
| mú-ù | mù | ì-kàsì | mì |
| cl3-thief | cl3^INTR | cl4-bridges | cl4^INTR |
| Which thief? | | Which bridges? | |
| è-kíná | yè | ì-síì | bì |
| cl7-deaf^person | cl7^INTR | cl8-antelopes | cl8^INTR |
| Which deaf person? | | Which antelopes? | |

3.7 VERBAL CONCORD SUBJECT MARKERS

The Mboshi verbal system has several tense and aspect markers. Subject markers in Mboshi indicate aspect and must agree with the subject head noun. In (4), these are presented as SM1 (perfective aspect), SM2 (imperfective aspect), and SM3 (stative copula). In each of these forms, the subject marker is prefixed onto the verbal root and are determined according to the class of the head noun phrase:

noun phrase [α-cl] + (SM [α-cl] - AUX) + SM [α-cl] - verb root - tense marker

Tense and degree of remoteness are indicated by suffixes which are variable and by auxiliary verbs whose prefixes must also concord with the subject (Robbins and Robbins 1987b; Fontaney 1989).

Perfective subject marker (SM1). The perfective subject marker is formed with the concord vowel and a high tone.⁶ The perfective marker indicates an action that has been completed. Some examples include:

- | | | | |
|--|-------------|---------------|------|
| (22) ò-yúrù | á-dzàá | á-bváá | kójì |
| cl1-woman | cl1^SM1-AUX | cl1^SM1-threw | wood |
| The woman threw the wood. (distant past) | | | |

⁶ In this particular verb prefix, many young Mboshi speakers do not respect the noun class concordial system and will use á- for all perfective verb forms regardless of the subject noun class.

à-yúrù á-bvéè kópì
 cl2-women cl2^SM1-threw wood
 The women threw the wood. (recent past)

káá é-dzáá é-Bémbáá sá òlòngò
 cl10^pangolins cl10^SM1-AUX cl10^SM1-walked in forest
 The pangolins walked in the forest. (distant past)

lè-káá í-Bémbì sá òlòngò
 cl11-pangolin cl11^SM1-walked in forest
 The pangolin walked in the forest. (recent past)

Imperfective subject marker (SM2). The imperfective subject marker consists of the concord marker syllable with a high tone and the concord vowel with a low tone (CVV with HL tone). Class 1, which semantically contains many human reference nouns, is the same as the /láà-/ conjugation of the third-person singular personal pronoun (§4). Classes 5 and 11 are represented by /lû-/ and not */dû-/ as would be anticipated.

(23) ò-yúrù láà-Bémbà ò nzàndé
 cl1-woman cl1^SM2-walk to market
 The woman is walking to the market.

à-yúrù á-dzè báà-Bémbà ò nzàndé
 cl2-women cl2^SM1-AUX cl2^SM2-walk to market
 The women were walking to the market. (recent past)

dz-ìà lû-Bémbà sá kó
 cl5-civet^cat cl5^SM2-walk in forest
 The civet cat is walking in the forest.

ì-bóBó bû-léà ìbvúà
 cl8-gorilla cl8^SM2-climb tree
 The gorillas are climbing the trees.

lè-ndùèngè lû-fùmbà
 cl11-termite cl11^SM2-fly
 The termite is flying.

bv-ùsò bá nzòí ó-dzáá bóò-tsínàà
 cl14-snout cl14^AM cl1^elephant cl14^SM1-AUX cl14^SM2-move
 The elephant's trunk was moving. (distant past)

Copula stative subject marker (SM3). This subject marker carries the concord tone and the concord marker vowel. In conversational Mboshi, this subject marker appears mostly on the copula.

(24) ò-yúrù à-dí ò-làá
 cl1-woman cl1^SM3-COP cl1-tall
 The woman is tall.

à-yúrù á-dí à-nè à-nè
 cl2-women cl2^SM3-COP cl2-big
 The women are fat.

ò-kólò ó-dí ò-kúlú
 cl3-blouse cl3^SM3-COP cl3-short
 The blouse is short

ì-kólò í-dí ì-làá ì-làá
 cl4-blouses cl4^SM3-COP cl4-long
 The blouses are long.

è-bèl é-dí è-nè
 cl7-barge cl7^SM3-COP cl7-big
 The barge is big.

ì-bèl í-dí ì-nè ì-nè
 cl8-barges cl8^SM3-COP cl8-big
 The barges are big.

3.8 RELATIVE MARKERS

The relative marker is formed by combining the concord marker and the relative morpheme which is represented by the concord vowel and tone. However, in class 1, the consonant is not the usual concord /w/, but a /y/ as also seen in the associative morpheme. Also in class 1, the vowel /e/ appears and not the concord vowel /o/. In classes 5 and 11, the relative is represented with a [l] consonant as seen in the imperfective subject marker (§3.7) and the associative morpheme (§3.4).

The head noun, as in all nominal class structures, determines the concordial constituents. The relative phrase uses the structure:

head noun [α -cl] + [*REL* [α -cl] - *verb* [α -cl]]

Both in the object and subject position the relative marker follows the head noun and must agree in class with the head noun.

- (25) ò-yùrù yèè-lámbà ìkṣṣ lè-bòngì líí-kàngà kóó
 cl1-woman cl1^REL-cook manioc cl11-fog cl11^REL-cover road
 the woman who cooks manioc the fog that covers the road
- b-éà bíí-lámbà òyùrù ì-bèì bíí-tsìnàà
 cl8-food cl8^REL-cook woman cl8-barges cl8^REL-move
 the food that the woman cooks the barges that move

An optional structure frequently appears when the head noun is the object in the relative clause. The relative prefix attaches to a 'dummy' verb which is the copula verb root -*di*. This optional relativizing forms the structure:

head noun [α -cl] + [*REL* [α -cl] - *COP* + *noun* [β -cl] + *verb* [β -cl]]

This variant is used more for the present situation at hand as opposed to a habitual state. However, both structures are often used interchangeably in informal speech as shown in (26).

- (26) ò-yùrù yèè-dí ì-bàà lû-bvâà
 cl1-woman cl1^REL-COP cl5-the^man cl5^SM2-care^for
 the woman that the man is caring for
- b-éà bíí-dí ò-yùrù láà-lámbà
 cl8-food cl8^REL-COP cl1-woman cl1^SM2-cook
 the food that the woman is cooking

When the subject head noun is modified by a relative clause in a sentence, the main verb of the sentence continues to concord with the head noun as well as the relative clause verb.

- (27) è-bèì yéé-tsìnàà yéè-Bèmbà ó nzàlé
 cl7-barge cl7^REL-moves cl7-is^floating on river
 The barge that moves is floating on the river.
- ò-yùrù yèè-lámbà b-éà láà-kiénà nàmà
 cl1-woman cl1^REL-cook cl8-food cl1-cut meat
 The woman who is cooking the food is cutting the meat.

3.9 QUANTIFIER 'WHOLE/ALL'

Quantity words in Mboshi usually function as adjectives. They take on a concordial adjective prefix and modify nouns by the associative construction as in (28).

- (28) ò-bvùà mǎ ò-tìnà
 cl3-mouse cl3^AM cl3-entire
 the entire mouse

à-kàkálà bà à-súsù
cl2-spiders cl2^AM cl2-certain
certain spiders

mí-ndà má ì-yíí
cl4-lamp cl4^AM cl4-alot
a lot of lamps

However, the word meaning 'whole' or 'all' takes on a different concordial prefix than the adjective prefix and never has a connecting marker as with the adjectives. The concord marker vowel with a high tone morpheme combines with the morpheme /-tsò/ to form the quantifier 'the whole' for the singular classes and 'all the' for the plural classes. The quantifier appears after the noun that it is modifying:

head noun [α -cl] + *QUAN* [α -cl]

(29) mbòmò	ó-tsò	à-mbòmò	á-tsò
cl1^python	cl1-whole	cl2-pythons	cl2-all
the whole python		all the pythons	
ò-kólò	ó-tsò	ì-kólò	í-tsò
cl3-shirt	cl3-whole	cl4-shirts	cl4-all
the whole shirt		all the shirts	
lè-bámbè	í-tsò	mbámbè	é-tsò
cl11-iguana	cl11-whole	cl10^iguanas	cl10-all
the whole iguana		all the iguanas	

3.10 NUMERALS

Syntactically, the numeral appears immediately after the noun it modifies, with no connecting marker as with adjectives. Each Mboshi numeral from one to five consists of a numeral root and a concord prefix. The numeral roots are invariable across classes, as are all numerals greater than five. Thus the numeral discussion here is limited to these five numerals.

(30) NUMERAL	ROOT
1	-pòó
2	-báà
3	-tsárè
4	-nàà
5	-táánì

Singular classes and numeral 1 prefixes. The numeral one prefix consists of the concord vowel and a surface low tone. Segmentally, these numeral one prefixes are also the same prefixes that serve as the adjective prefixes for their respective class (refer to the table in (4)). In the case of classes 3 and 14, the lowered vowel /o/ appears instead of the concord vowel /u/. As has been seen throughout these two classes, this lower vowel occurs frequently in certain concordial morphemes.

Since the number 'one' is by definition singular, it can only be used to modify the odd-numbered singular noun classes as in (31).

(31) ò-sáßì	ò-pòó	ì-bíà	ì-pòó
cl3-finger	cl3-one	cl5-palm^tree	cl5-one
one finger		one palm tree	
ngòngá	è-pòó	bv-àrè	ò-pòó
cl9-hour	cl9-one	cl14-canoe	cl14-one
one hour		one canoe	

Plural classes and numeral 2-5 prefixes. Numerals 2 through 5 prefixes also consist of the concord vowel but carry a surface high tone. Numeral prefixes are the only situation where the concord tone is established by singular/plural distinctions rather than by the base grammatical morpheme or noun class concord marker. Class 10 has three variations where numeral 2 has a N- prefix, numeral 3 has lost its prefix, and numerals 4 and 5 continue to utilize the concord vowel with a high tone. The prefix variation seems to be affected by the initial numeral root consonant. Numeral 2 root initial consonant /b/ can be prenasalized in Mboshi, whereas numerals 3 through 5 initial root consonants do not prenasalize or are already nasal.

Since these numbers are plurals, they can only be used to modify the even-numbered plural noun classes as in (32).

(32) à-yùrù	á-bàá	ì-sàBì	í-tsàré	à-bíà	á-tááni
cl2-women	cl2-two	cl4-fingers	cl4-three	cl6-palm [^] trees	cl6-five
two women		three fingers		five palm trees	
ngóló	m-bàá	ngóló	Ø-tsàré	ngóló	é-nàà
cl10 [^] baskets	cl10-two	cl10 [^] baskets	cl10-three	cl10 [^] baskets	cl10-four
two baskets		three baskets		four baskets	

3.11 THIRD-PERSON PRONOUNS

During discourse and in a context when a particular object has already been introduced, the noun can be replaced by a third-person pronoun. If the pronoun is used, it represents the entire noun phrase that it is referring to. Mboshi third-person pronouns indicate the noun class of the object being referred to. Third-person pronouns can replace any noun constituent in a sentence. The phonetic realization of each class pronoun is formed with the *concord marker syllable + high tone + -à*. There are two surface realizations that go through morphophonemic changes as a result of this morpheme formation. Class 1 goes through concord vowel deletion *wò + à → wà*. The class 1 pronoun thus is identical with the third-person pronoun, *wà* (§4). In classes 7 and 9 the concord marker vowel /e/ assimilates: *yé- + -à → yàà*. The third-person pronouns can be seen by comparing them with similar sentences in (33) and (34).

- (33) *múà* *módò-pè* *ngá* *kiérè*
 cl3[^]PRO cl3[^]SM2-make 1s[^]PRO mad
 It (the argument-cl3) is making me mad.
- míà* *mû-pè* *ngá* *kiérè*
 cl4[^]PRO cl4[^]SM2-make 1s[^]PRO mad
 They(the arguments-cl4) are making me mad.
- búà* *bódò-tsínàà*
 cl14[^]PRO cl14[^]SM2-move
 It (the elephant's trunk-cl14) is moving.
- è-bóBó* *yèè-léà* *díà*
 cl7-gorilla cl7[^]SM2-climb cl5[^]PRO
 The gorilla is climbing it (the tree-cl5).
- ì-bóBò* *bû-léà* *máà*
 cl8-gorillas cl8[^]SM2-climb cl6[^]PRO
 The gorillas are climbing them (the trees-cl6).

- (34) *wà* *à-dí* *ò-láà* *báà* *á-dí* *à-nèè*
 cl1[^]PRO cl1[^]SM3-COP cl1-long cl2[^]PRO cl2-SM3[^]COP cl2-big
 She (the woman-cl1) is tall. They (the women-cl2) are fat.

múà ò-dí ò-kúlú
cl3^{PRO} cl3^{SM3-COP} cl3-short
It (the blouse-cl3) is short.

mîa í-dí ì-làá ì-làá
cl4^{PRO} cl4^{SM3-COP} cl4-long
They (the blouses-cl4) are long.

4. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

In personal pronouns, the same forms also serve in subject and object positions. It will be noted that the second-person singular and third-person singular have a low tone, the third-person plural has a high-low tone, and the others have a high tone. The third-person singular is identical with the pronoun and set of agreements as class 1; and the third-person plural is identical with the pronoun and set of agreements as class 2. Classes 1 and 2 are generally considered the classes that contain the most nouns of human reference (§7). The other personal pronouns take on their own agreements as can be seen in the verb conjugations in (35).

(35) ngá lî-dzàà
1s^{PRO} 1s^{SM2-eat}
I am eating.

nò lóò-dzàà
2s^{PRO} 2s^{SM2-eat}
You are eating.

wà láà-dzàà
3s^{PRO} 3s^{SM2-eat}
He is eating.

mórò láà-tàà wà
cl1^{person} cl1^{SM2-look^at} 3s^{PRO}
The man is looking at him.

bísí léè-dzàà
1p^{PRO} 1p^{SM2-eat}
We are eating.

bíní léè-dzàà
2p^{PRO} 2s^{SM2-eat}
You are eating.

báà báà-dzàà
3p^{PRO} 3p^{SM2-eat}
They are eating.

mórò láà-tàà báà
cl1^{person} cl1^{SM2-look^at} 3p^{PRO}
The man is looking at them.

5. GENDERS AND CLASS PAIRINGS

As was mentioned earlier, most singular nouns belong to an odd numbered class and its corresponding plural belongs to the sequential even numbered class. In class pairing discussions of this type, such a singular-plural pair has been referred to as GENDER. Genders 9/6 and 11/10 deviate from this sequential pairing in Mboshi. The collected nouns for this study show three cases of a 3/2 gender; four cases of a 7/6 gender; and one 5/2 gender and one 5/10 gender. Class 14 contains singular nouns and pairs inconsistently with several plural even classes (see (37)). There are also nouns that only exist in one class as an invariable form due to the semantic nature of the noun. Most of these nouns are objects that are non-countable or only one is in existence. These are represented in tables in (37) and (38) as pairing with no class (single class genders).

(36) The most frequent genders

Gender 1(a)/2

mù-áná	b-áná
cl1-child	cl2-children
ò-yésíí	à-yésíí
cl1-teacher	cl2-teachers
Ø-nzòì	à-nzòì
cl1a-elephant	cl2-elephants

mù-ásí	b-ásí
cl1-woman	cl2-women
ò-bínì	à-bínì
cl1-dancer	cl2-dancers
Ø-tsósó	à-tsósó
cl1a-chicken	cl2-chickens

Gender 3/4

ò-mbìngè	ì-mbìngè
cl3-mud	cl4-mud(types)

ò-sèsèngì	ì-sèsèngì
cl3-sand^river	cl4-sand^rivers

	ò- Bémbá cl3-trip mù- mbá cl3-grave	ì- Bémbá cl4-trips mì- mbá cl4-graves	ò- kàsi cl3-bridge mù- èlé cl3-thing	ì- kàsi cl4-bridges mì- èlé cl4-things
Gender 5/6	ì- bàà cl5-liver ì- tàà cl5-tadpole dì- ísi (dísi) cl5-eye	à- bàà cl6-livers à- tàà cl6-tadpoles m- ísi cl6-eyes	ì- désù cl5-bean ì- kòò cl5-foot dì- émì (dzémi) cl5-pregnancy	à- désù cl6-beans à- kòò cl6-feet m- émì cl6-pregnancies
Gender 7/8	è- bóBó cl7-gorilla è- Bèsé cl7-bone	ì- bóBó cl8-gorillas ì- Bèsé cl8-bones	è- bèi cl7-barge è- bèndé cl7-metal	ì- bèi cl8-barges ì- bèndé cl8-metals
Gender 9/6	tóò cl9^lung nzá lé cl9^river	à- tóò cl6-lungs a- nzálé cl6-rivers	kíngí cl9^neck mbéè cl9^pipe	à- kíngí cl6-necks a- mbéè cl6-pipes
Gender 11/10	lè- nzénzì cl11-fingernail lè- bóbòó cl11-night^bird	nz ónzì cl10^fingernails bóbòó cl10^night^birds	lè- mbànzí cl11-side lè- káá cl11-pangolin	mbà nzí cl10^sides káá cl10^pangolins
Minor genders	ò- bvùà cl3-mouse è- ngóò cl7-big^drum	à- bvùà cl2-mice à- ngóò cl6-big^drums	ì- bàà cl5-boy è- kòò cl7-foot	à- bàà cl2-boys à- kòò cl6-feet
Single class genders	ngóò cl1a^mother à- lèmbò cl6-glue	à- Bándè cl2-demons è- lèBí cl7-clay	ò- lóngó cl3-envy ì- pááná cl8-false^courage	míá cl4^fire ngì èlé cl9^Brazzaville ì- bèlà cl5-leprosy bómó cl14^fear

(37) Class pairings/genders - occurrences (plurals across, singulars down)

Class	NP	2		4		6		8		10			single	total
		à-	b-	ì-	mì-	à-	m-	ì-	b-	Ø-	Ø-N	N		
1	ò-	63												63
	mù-		4											4
1a	Ø	75											2	77
	Ø-N	78											4	82
3	ò-	3		198									41	242
	mu-				18								1	19
5	ì-	1				105				1			10	117
	à-					10	6						8	18
	dì-					1		138	2				2	9
7	è-					4							3	147
9	Ø-					27							15	42
	Ø-N					28							15	43

11	lè-							28	33	4	7	72		
14	Ø-	5			1						1	7		
	bv			1	1	1						3		
single		1	1	2	22	4	2	1				33		
total		226	5	198	21	199	11	140	3	29	33	4	109	1956

(38) Class pairings/genders - percentages (plurals across, singulars down)

Class	2		4		6		8		10			single	total	
	à-	b-	l-	mì-	à-	m-	l-	b-	Ø-	Ø-N	N			
1	à-	6.4	20.6	1.8	11	0.6	14.5	0.2	0.1	3	3.4	0.4	6.4	
	mù-	0.4											0.4	
1a	Ø	7.8											0.2	8
	Ø-N	8											0.4	8.4
3	à-	0.3											4.2	25.1
	mu-			0.1	1.9									
5	l-	0.1			1								12.2	
	Ø-				1								0.8	1.8
	dì-				0.1	0.6							0.2	0.9
7	è-				0.4								0.3	15.3
9	Ø-				2.8								1.5	4.3
	Ø-N				2.9								1.5	4.4
11	lè-									3	3.4	0.4	0.7	7.5
14	Ø-	0.5			0.1								0.1	0.7
	bv			0.1	0.1	0.1								0.3
single		0.1	0.1	0.2	2.3	0.4	0.2	0.1						3.4
total		23.2	0.5	20.6	2.1	20.7	1.1	14.7	0.3	3.1	3.4	0.4	11	

As can be seen from the tables in (37) and (38), a negligible number of noun genders fall outside of the typical gender system described above.

6. LOAN WORDS AND PERSONAL NAMES

In determining whether the present Mboshi noun classification is phonemically or semantically motivated, it is particularly interesting to look at how loan words and personal names have been accommodated and classified. Mboshi has taken most of its loan words from French and to a lesser degree, English and Portuguese. Mboshi personal names consist of French names or traditional names taken from objects or concepts in the real world.

6.1 LOAN WORDS

When borrowing a noun into Mboshi, the classification of this new word is affected significantly by the initial phoneme of the borrowed word. The Mboshi word for bench is [lèbá] which comes from the French phrase 'le banc'. The classification takes its clue from the definite article [le] and places it into class 11, the class with the [lè-] prefix. In following the normal gender pairing the plural form 'benches' falls into class 10 and becomes [mbá]. Nasal loans also follow their classification lead phonemically. The word 'mesa' (Portuguese loan) falls into class 9 and takes a class 6 plural gender. This initial phoneme determination can be seen in other loans.

(39) lè-bá	le banc (French)	lè-pinààrà	les épinards (French)
cl11-bench	'bench'	cl11-spinach	'spinach'

mbá cl10^benches	(single-gender noun)		
mésá cl9^table	mesa (Portuguese) 'table'	ò-tòmòbílì cl3-truck	automobile (English/French) 'truck'
a-mésá cl6-tables	'tables'	ì-tòmòbílì cl4-trucks	'trucks'

In arguing for semantic involvement in noun classification, some loan words, however, are categorized on the basis of their semantic content. This can be seen when comparing the proper nouns for countries and the respective name for its citizens. The Mboshi word for Germany, **dzámání**, from English falls into class 9 where other proper noun locations are found, but does not take the nasal prefix. Likewise, the Mboshi word for German (citizen of Germany) is also **dzámání** but falls into class 1 and forms its plural as **àdzámání** class 2 because semantically, gender 1/2 contains the bulk of human reference nouns. Another noun that is classified semantically is the word policeman, **pòlísè** taken from the French, (la) police. The word has a null prefix and is placed in class 1. Its plural is given a class 2 form **àpòlísè** and follows class 2 concordance. However, other loan words that carry a null morpheme and are not human references may fall into either class 1 or class 5 as in (40).

(40)(Ø)-súßù	soupe (French)	(Ø)-sòsètè	chaussette (French)
cl5-soup	'soup'	cl1-socks	'socks'

For most Mboshi speakers, all human loan words are categorized as gender 1/2.⁷

Proper noun locations (i.e., countries) that are loan words fall into class 9. However, when the proper noun is vowel initial, it is categorized into a class according to the vowel prefix. For example, the word for America **àméríké** falls into class 6 even though class 6 is a plural class.

6.2 PERSONAL NAMES

Typically, personal names fall into gender 1/2 (Welmers 1973:166). Yet in Mboshi, it is interesting to see both the phonemic and semantic influence when looking at noun phrases that have personal names as the head noun. In the most frequent phrasal situations where a personal name leads the noun phrase, such as a non-qualified subject or object, class 1 is always assigned to the person as would be expected.

(41) French Names		Traditional Names	
jean láà-dzàà		ambiero láà-dzàà	
Jean cl1^SM2-eat		Ambiero cl1^SM2-eat	
Jean is eating.		Ambiero is eating.	
oscar à-dí	ò-né	ngala à-dí	ò-né
Oscar cl1^SM3-COP	cl1-big	Ngala cl1^SM3-COP	cl1-big
Oscar is fat.		Ngala is fat.	

However, when other noun class concord structures are used in the noun phrase where a personal name is the head, classification is determined by its initial phoneme even if it means falling into a plural class. This classification is true for both French names and traditional names. Traditional Mboshi names do not necessarily fall into the same class as the word from which they are taken, nor do they always function as if from a single class.

⁷ Some Mboshi speakers add an *o-* prefix to human loan words.

(42) French Names

ernest yá ngìlélé
 Ernest cl7^{AM} Brazzaville
 Ernest from Brazzaville

oscar mù
 Oscar cl3^{INTR}
 Which Oscar?

joseph wó
 Joseph cl1^{DEM}
 this Joseph

Traditional Names

imongi lá ngìlélé
 Imongi cl5^{AM} Brazzaville
 Imongi from Brazzaville

ngala yè
 Ngala cl9^{INTR}
 Which Ngala?

ambiero má
 Ambiero cl6^{DEM}
 this Ambiero

It is thus apparent that loans and personal names can be classified according to their phonemic form, or according to their semantics; or nouns can be classified both phonemically and semantically (as in the case of personal names) where dual classification determined by grammatical context exists.

7. NOUN CLASS SEMANTIC CONTENT

Although some Mboshi noun classification is phonemically motivated, that does not mean that the classes are completely void of semantic unity and cohesiveness. As in most Bantu languages, there seems to be a residual semantic correlation (Welmers 1973:161). The following is a general account of the semantic content of the noun genders.

Gender 1/2. As is typical in most Bantu languages, the bulk of the nouns in this Mboshi gender are human referents or animate life forms. This gender proved to be the most consistent in guarding its Proto-Bantu semantic identity. Psychologically, this gender seems to be semantically the strongest. When collecting nouns for this study, the Mboshi speaker who provided the data had a hard time accepting the fact that there were non-life forms that were included in this gender and that certain human referents were not included.

Gender 1a/2. The majority of gender 1a/2 nasal initial nouns are animals except for a few human referents such as: prostitute, fetish priest, street urchin, mother, girl. These 'exceptions' are most likely due to how Mboshi categorizes semantic fields rather than unusual classification. The rest of gender 1a/2 consists of entries which include other animate nouns such as birds, insects, and reptiles as well as some varied plants. Other similar life forms are found throughout the other genders. According to Welmers (1973), typically, the nasal gender 9/10 contains mostly animal names. The actuality that the 9/10 gender does not occur but both nasal classes do in Mboshi coupled with the fact that the animals in this 1a subclass all have nasal initial roots may suggest a shift of the animals from 9/10 gender to a 1a/2 gender in Mboshi.

Gender 3/4. The core of this gender are also animals and insects, or nouns referring to their anatomical parts. Human reference is frequent as well as fruit or plant life. Since this gender is the largest Mboshi gender, the semantic variety seems logical.

Gender 5/6. The majority of human anatomy, body functions and needs fall into this gender. Plant life is also prevalent in this class.

Gender 7/8. This gender is semantically disparate and carries a wide variety of noun pairs, corresponding to its status as the second largest gender.

Gender 9/6. A great deal of the general terrain nouns (i.e., river) fall into this gender.

Gender 11/10. This gender includes miscellaneous nouns.

Gender 14. This gender represents less than 1% of the data. Yet, there are several genders with class 14 as the singular (14/2, 14/4, 14/6). The semantic content of each

of these minor genders range within the semantic content of the plural class pair as in (43).

(43) bòlà cl14^opposite^sex^sibling	bv-ùsò cl14-animal^trunk/snout	bàlàbàlà cl14^road
à-bòlà cl2-opposite^sex^siblings	mì-òsò cl4-animal^trunks/snouts	à-bàlàbàlà cl6-roads

Other minor double class genders. Mboshi has the following minor genders: 3/2, 5/2, 5/10, 7/6. In some cases, the semantic content can be seen as associating with the class of one of the pairs in the gender. Either the singular pair is consistent with the semantic content of its class or the plural pair is consistent with its class semantics as shown in (44).

(44) ò-bvùà cl3-mouse	ì-bàà cl5-boy	è-bóò cl7-arm
à-bvùà cl2-mice	à-bàà cl2-boys	à-bóò cl6-arms

In other cases, the semantic association with either pair is not evident as in (45).

(45) ì-Bóò cl5-affair	è-ngóò cl7-large^drum
póò cl10^affairs	à-ngóò cl6-large^drums

Single class genders. All the classes except classes 1 and 10 have single class genders. Uncountable and abstract nouns such as liquids, powders, and abstract states of being that do not have plurals account for the majority of these genders. Class 3 contains a third of these single class gender nouns. However, single class gender 9 contains the unique locations (i.e., cities and countries) as well as some abstract nouns.

As a whole, when looking at the semantic content of the genders, it is hard to classify them consistently. Gender 1/2 seems to be the closest to the typical Bantu semantic generalizations. The discussion of loan words also seem to support this conclusion. In addition, the continued collapsing of classes is evident by this mixed class content and lack of consistent semantic categories in certain classes. Class 14 is nearly lost in modern Mboshi.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The data collected and analyzed for this study shows that Mboshi still has 12 of the Proto-Bantu noun classes. Presently, the classification of a noun into a class is motivated both by the phonemic realization of the noun prefix and by the semantics of the noun. Gender 1/2 assignment is still strongly determined by semantics.

The function of the Mboshi concord marker underlies and coordinates the noun phrase structure in which it operates. The head noun determines the concord and set of agreements in the noun phrase including demonstratives, verbal prefixes, adjectives, modifying structures, interrogatives, quantifiers, numerals, and the pronouns. Also, underlying forms often undergo phonemic, and tonal derivations to surface forms. Class 1 continues to have a Proto-Bantu low-tone concord seen in many other Bantu languages, whereas the other classes now have a high tone concord marker. However, class 9 no longer has its Proto-Bantu low tone concord also seen in many Bantu languages. In Mboshi, class 9 now follows the other class concords in carrying a high tone.

Mboshi is typical of other Bantu languages in that there is a general collapsing and shifting of Proto-Bantu classes. Also, Proto-Bantu concordial consonant segments have been lost over time in many of the Mboshi prefixes. Only a minimal number of Proto-Bantu relics continue to exist on certain noun prefixes, but their classification in the concord system confirms the identity of Mboshi classes with their Proto-Bantu predecessors.

REFERENCES

- Fontaney, Louise. 1988-89. Mboshi, Steps towards a grammar, 1-2. Pholia 3-4, Laboratoire de Phonétique et Linguistique Africaine. Université Lumière, Lyon 2.
- Guthrie, Malcolm. 1970. Comparative Bantu: An introduction to the comparative linguistics and prehistory of the Bantu languages, 1. Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers.
- Meeussen, A.E. 1967. Bantu grammatical reconstruction. *Africana Linguistica* III.61:80-122.
- Obenga, Théophile. 1976. La cuvette congolaise - Les hommes et les structures. *Présence Africaine*.
- Robbins, Larry and Camille Robbins. 1987a. Esquisse préliminaire de la phonologie du mbochi, parler de Boundji. Unpublished manuscript.
- . 1987b. Introduction au système verbal du mbochi, parler de Boundji. Unpublished manuscript.
- Welmers, William E. 1973. African language structures. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.