On the realization of tripartite number in Northeastern Africa

Jan Junglas
Humboldt Universität Berlin

Encompassing a variety of languages subsumed traditionally under Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan, Northeastern Africa is a hotbed of so-called tripartite number marking systems (DIMMENDAAL 2000). Compared to common bipartite number systems as, for example, in many Indo-European (e.g. English) and Niger-Congo languages (e.g. Swahili), morphological number in tripartite systems can be marked in three different ways. Besides the morphological plural marking of an unmarked singular form (which can also be found in bipartite systems), two more marking patterns can be observed: morphologically marked singular forms of unmarked plural nouns as well as nouns marked for both singular and plural. The number of languages with tripartite number marking as such is considerable (cf. GÜLDEMANN 2018: 257) but its realization varies significantly on both a morphological and semantic level. The aim of my talk is a short introduction to the phenomenon of tripartite number followed by the analysis and comparison of certain languages from Northeastern Africa (e.g., Krongo, Ik, Gaam) exhibiting tripartite number in different ways. In addition, clear-cut definitions are presented in order to disentangle the partly ambiguous treatment of tripartite number marking systems.

References
