

Number in Dutch and Endo: Form versus Meaning?

Joost Zwarts

Not all languages make the distinction between singular and plural nouns in the same way. In many languages plurals are simply those nouns marked by a suffix that singular nouns do not have (e.g. English *shoe* versus *shoes*). Endo, a southern Nilotic (Kalenjin) language spoken in Kenya, makes the singular-plural distinction in a different way (like quite a few other Nilo-Saharan languages). Relatively many nouns in this language are plural without being morphologically marked as such. A noun like *mur* 'rats' and mass nouns like *chaayi* 'tea' behave for agreement exactly the same as marked plurals like *kipawtiin* 'rhinos', with the plural suffix *-tiin*. Singular nouns can be derived from unmarked plurals by means of *singulative* suffixes, like *mur-yaan* 'rat'. I will compare the number system of Endo with that of Dutch and hypothesize that Endo defines plurality semantically (in terms of cumulative reference), while Dutch defines plurality morphologically (in terms of a plural suffix).