

CLICK ADOPTION AND INSERTION IN XHOSA:  
REVISITING THE ROLE OF *HLONIPHA*

RHODES UNIVERSITY – 25 AUGUST 2020

Hilde Gunnink – Ghent University (BantUGent – UGent centre for Bantu Studies)

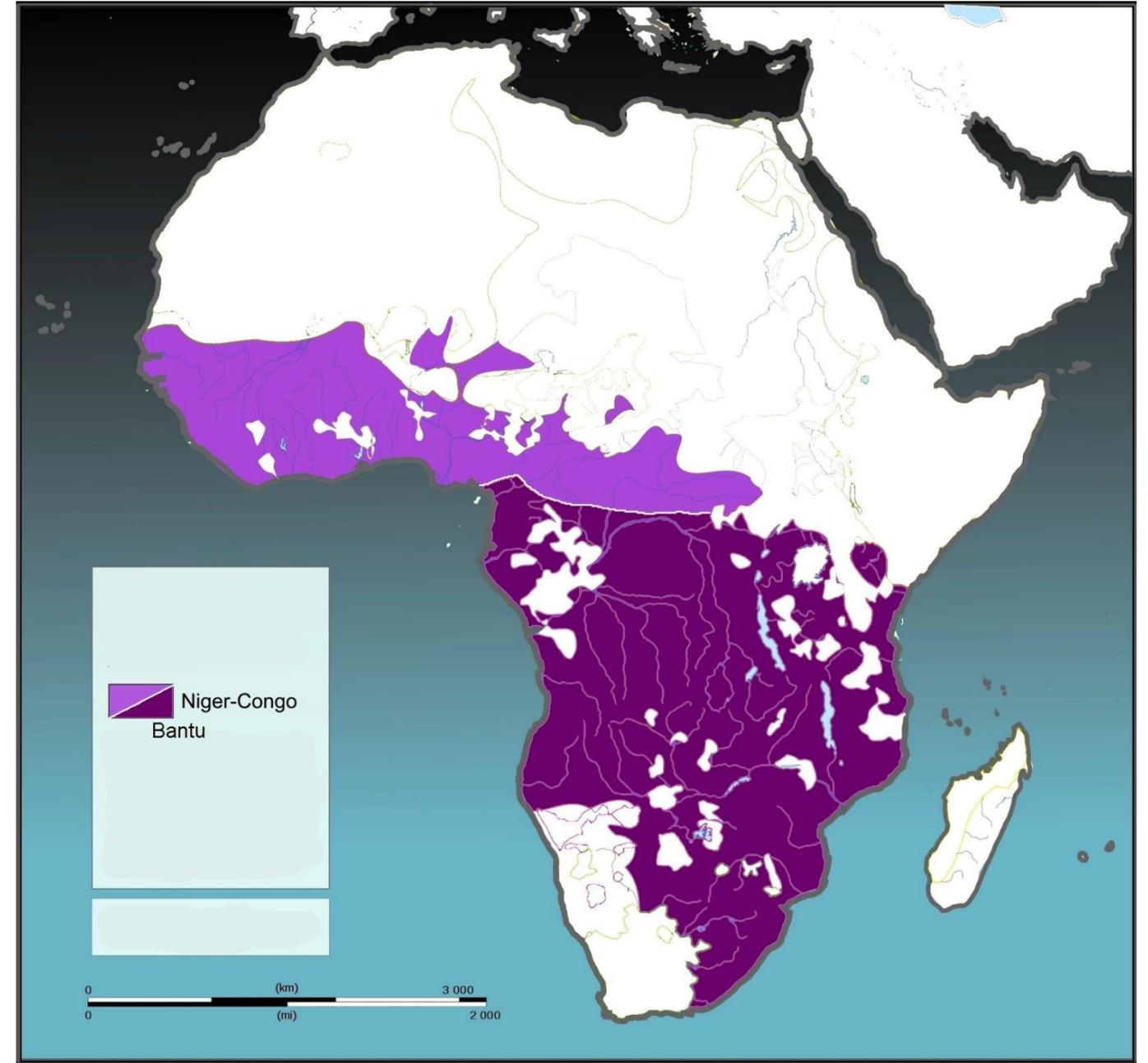
**“Language contact between migrating Bantu speakers and resident Khoisan speakers in southern Africa.”**

**FWO Postdoctoral project – 2018-2021**

# BANTU LANGUAGES

Bantu languages  
a subfamily of Niger-Congo

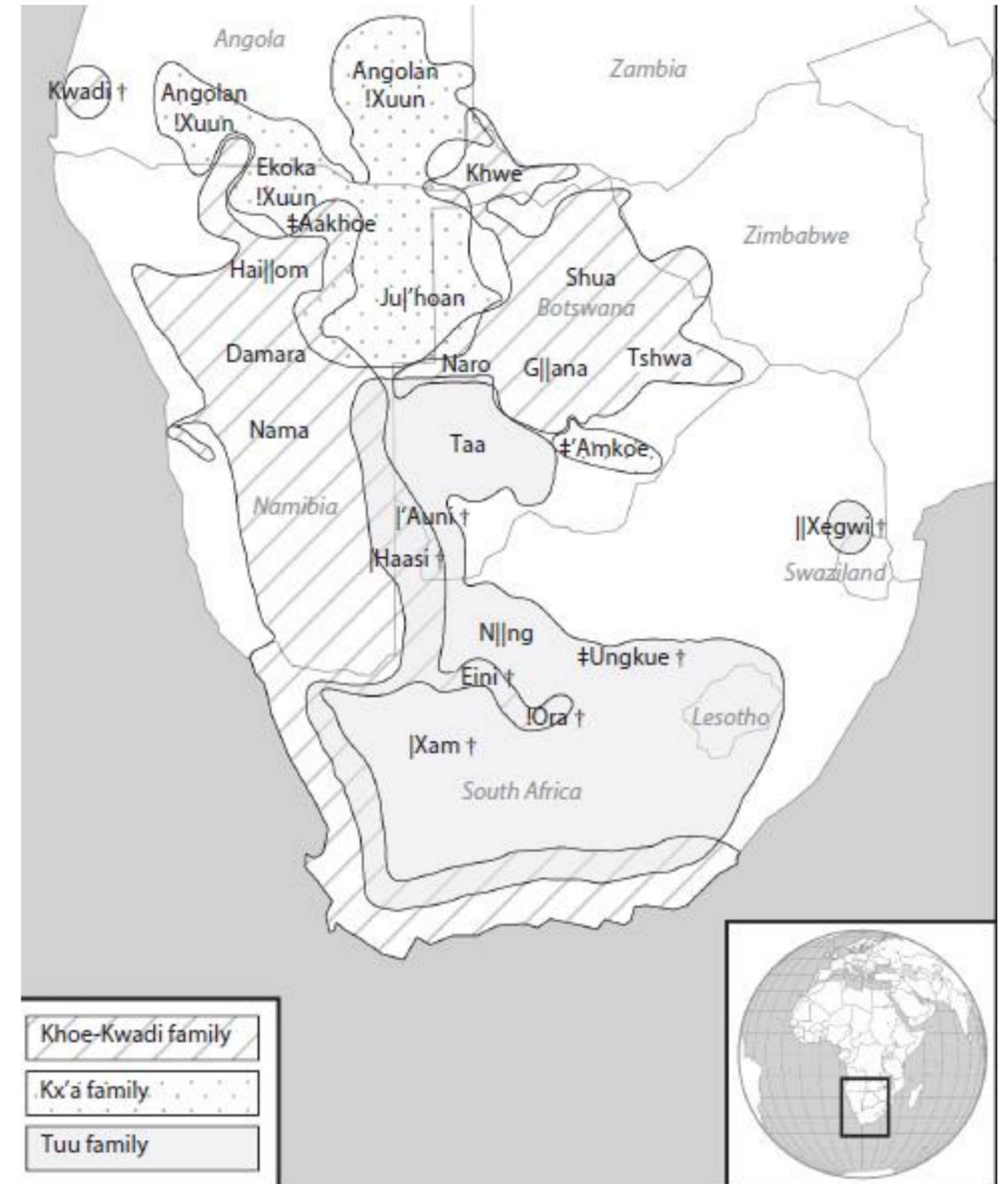
The Bantu expansion  
from +- 2,000 BC onwards  
migration to the south and east  
ultimately covering most of subequatorial  
Africa



# PRE-BANTU SOUTHERN AFRICA

“**Khoisan**”: languages with phonemic clicks that do not belong to another language family (e.g. Bantu or Cushitic)

- Kx'a (Northern Khoisan)
- Khoe-Kwadi (Central Khoisan)
- Tuu (Southern Khoisan)



# BANTU/KHOISAN LANGUAGE CONTACT

- Lexicon:
  - loanwords
  - lexical semantics
- Phonology
  - clicks
  - other rare consonants
- Morphology
  - borrowed affixes
  - contact-induced grammaticalization

# OVERVIEW

Click adoption and insertion in Xhosa: revisiting the role of *hlonipha*

Clicks in Xhosa

An introduction to hlonipha

The role of click insertion in hlonipha

The role of click insertion in other Bantu languages

Other explanations for click insertion

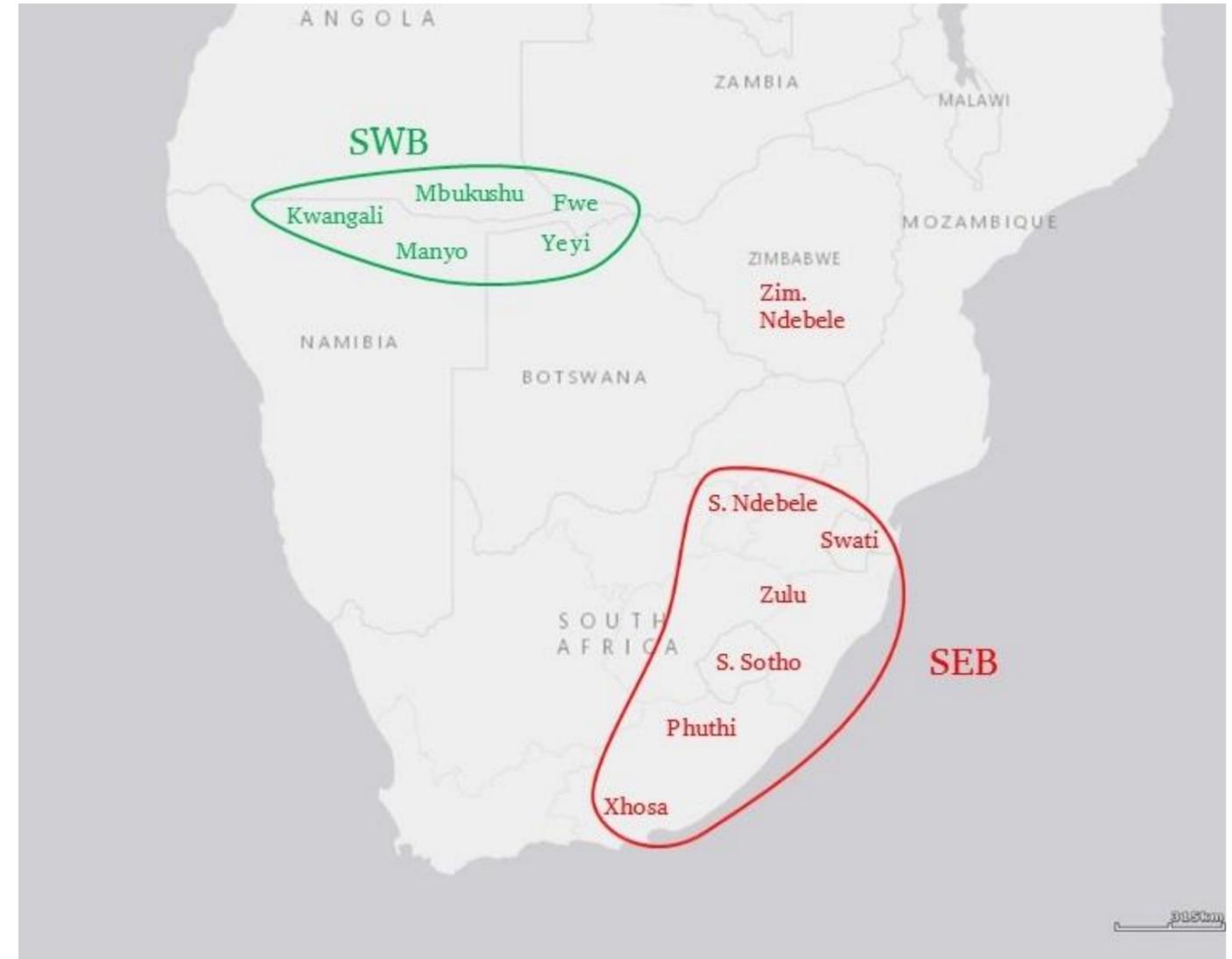
1. Isikhwetha: secret lexicon of male initiates
2. Sound symbolism & ideophones
3. Identity-marking

# CLICKS IN XHOSA

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# CLICKS IN BANTU LANGUAGES

- Clicks are crosslinguistically rare
- No clicks in Bantu languages outside Southern Africa
- Clicks are abundant in Khoisan languages in Southern Africa
- > Clicks are clearly the result of Khoisan contact



# CLICKS IN XHOSA

The click inventory of Xhosa

	Dental	Palato-alveolar	Lateral
Voiceless	<b>c</b>	<b>q</b>	<b>x</b>
Voiced	<b>gc</b>	<b>gq</b>	<b>gx</b>
Aspirated	<b>ch</b>	<b>qh</b>	<b>xh</b>
Nasal	<b>nc</b>	<b>nq</b>	<b>nx</b>
Prenasalized voiced	<b>ngc</b>	<b>ngq</b>	<b>ngx</b>
Prenasalized voiceless	<b>nkc</b>	<b>nkq</b>	<b>nkx</b>

# CLICKS IN XHOSA

Clicks in Xhosa have a high functional load

- +/-17% of the lexicon consists of click words
- Almost half of the Xhosa phoneme inventory consists of phonemes of non-Bantu origin
  - 24% of the phoneme inventory consists of click phonemes

# CLICKS IN XHOSA

In Khoisan borrowings

- **i-qaqa** ‘polecat’ < ꞤUngkue **!kx'a!kx'a** ‘weasel’
- **i-xhego** ‘old man’ < llXegwi **llkxexo** ‘old man’
- **ngcwaba** ‘bury’ < N|uu **ŋloβa** ‘bury’
- **umqala** ‘throat’ < Khoekhoe **um!ara-b** ‘throat’
- **igxalaba** ‘shoulder blade’ < Khoekhoe **llgara-b** ‘shoulder blade’

# CLICKS IN XHOSA

In words of Bantu origin

- **cim-a** ‘extinguish’ < Proto-Bantu \***dím** ‘be extinguished’
- **qal-a** ‘start’ < Proto-Bantu \***bád** ‘begin’
- **chith-a** ‘spill’ < Proto-Bantu \***jìt** ‘pour’
- **muncu** ‘sour’ < Zulu **munyu/muncu** ‘sour’
- **ucingo** ‘wire’ < Proto-Bantu \***díng** ‘turn round, wind round, wrap up’

*Click insertion was not phonologically motivated!*

# HLONIPHA

# HLONIPHA

*Isihlonipho sabafazi*: women's language of respect

- practiced by Nguni and Southern Sotho communities: Xhosa, Zulu, Swati, Ndebele, Southern Sotho
- practice is falling into disuse
- respect through avoidance: married women practice physical and linguistic avoidance of their in-laws
  - physical avoidance:
    - no eye contact
    - no physical contact
    - etc

# HLONIPHA

Linguistic avoidance:

- avoidance of names
- avoidance of roots
- avoidance of syllables

Example: father-in-law Ntlokwana

avoid: Ntlokwana (name), **intloko** ‘head’, any word with **ntlo**

Example: father-in-law Saki

avoid: **sam** ‘my’, **usana** ‘baby’, **iswekile** ‘sugar’

# HLONIPHA

## Linguistic avoidance

- avoidance vocabulary can be very large: all syllables from a large number of in-laws' names need to be avoided
- avoidance vocabulary can be very idiolectal: dependant on names of in-laws

# HLONIPHA

Alternative lexemes are created in different ways

– semantic strategies:

**ukwazi** ‘know’ > hlonipha **ukuyila** ‘plan, plot’

**imbola** ‘red clay’ > hlonipha **ibomvu** ‘red’

**ukuhamba** ‘walk’ > hlonipha **ukunyathela** ‘tread’

– derivation:

**ingubo** ‘blanket’ > hlonipha **intyatho** < **tyatha** ‘carry over the shoulder’

**ingalo** ‘arm’ > hlonipha **isamkelo** < **amkela** ‘receive’

**ucango** ‘door’ > hlonipha **isivalo** < **vala** ‘close’

# HLONIPHA

Alternative lexemes are created in different ways

– borrowing:

**imbiza** ‘pot’ > hlonipha **impotwe** ‘pot’ < English

**umbona** ‘maize’ < hlonipha **umilisi** < Afrikaans

**intaka** ‘bird’ < hlonipha **inyoni** < Zulu

**inqwelo** ‘wagon’ < hlonipha **ikoloyiya** < Southern Sotho

# HLONIPHA

Alternative lexemes are created in different ways

– phoneme deletion:

**umkhono** ‘arm’ > hlonipha **um’ono**

**andifuni** ‘I don’t want’ > hlonipha **andi’uni**

**iswekile** ‘sugar’ > hlonipha **i’ekile**

– phoneme replacement:

**izolo** ‘yesterday’ > hlonipha **iyolo**

**inqwelo** ‘wagon’ > hlonipha **ishwelo**

**ucango** ‘door’ > hlonipha **uhlango**

# HLONIPHA

Phoneme replacement:

- **itamla** ‘axe’ > hlonipha **inqamla**
- **ityala** ‘case’ > hlonipha **icala**
  
- Clicks were useful in hlonipha substitutes:
  - “icons of foreignness”
  - not yet used in native words
- Hlonipha substitutes became incorporated in regular Xhosa lexicon
- **Conclusion: hlonipha explains click insertion in Xhosa** (Werner 1905, Faye 1925, Herbert 1990, Irvine & Gal 2000)

# RE-EVALUATING HLONIPHA

Did hlonipha lead to the insertion of clicks in Xhosa words?

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes?
2. Do hlonipha words gradually become part of the regular Xhosa lexicon?
3. Do all Bantu click languages practice hlonipha?

# CLICK INSERTION IN HOLONIPHA

# XHOSA HLONIPHA CORPUS

966 hlonipha substitutes for 498 Xhosa words

The Greater Xhosa Dictionary (1989-2006)	264 hlonipha substitutes
Robert Godfrey (1909-1934)	172 hlonipha substitutes
Tessa Dowling (1988)	350 hlonipha substitutes
Godfrey Mzamane (1962)	72 hlonipha substitutes
Rosalie Finlayson (1978-1984)	230 hlonipha substitutes

# XHOSA HLONIPHA CORPUS

Big fat caveat on data: it is not clear how & where all data were collected

- Fieldwork among Xhosa-speaking, hlonipha-using women in Eastern Cape and Cape Town by Dowling ('80s) and Finlayson ('70s)
- Fieldwork? by Godfrey (1910-1940) and Mzamane ('50s) in Eastern Cape
- Greater Xhosa Dictionary: “Circumstances did not permit of the collection and recording of this hlonipha vocabulary, but a few **commonly used words** furnished by members of the staff have been included in this dictionary.”

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes in Xhosa?
  - phoneme replacement accounts for 75 out of 966 hlonipha substitutes
    - click insertion accounts for 8 out of 75 cases of phoneme replacement

“Straightforward” cases of click insertion

**ityala** > hlonipha **icala** ‘case’ (Mzamane 1962)

**itamla** > hlonipha **inqamla** ‘axe, hatchet’ (Mini et al. 2003)

**ijikolo** ‘earring’ > hlonipha **iqintolo** ‘earring’ (Opland 2019)

**ukuhamba** ‘walk’ > hlonipha **ukuhangxa** ‘walk’ (Dowling 1988)

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes in Xhosa?
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Click insertion based on hlonipha substitutes

**indoda** > hlonipha **inyentsa** / **incentisa** ‘man’

**amehlo** > hlonipha **amalozelo** / **amacozelo** ‘eyes’

**isilanda** > hlonipha **isityumso** / **isicumso** ‘needle’

**utywala** > hlonipha **umhlombothi** / **umqombothi** ‘alcohol’

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes in Xhosa?
  - phoneme replacement accounts for 75 out of 966 hlonipha substitutes
    - click insertion accounts for 8 out of 75 cases of phoneme replacement
    - click loss accounts for 17 out of 75 cases of phoneme replacement

**incwadi** > hlonipha **ikwadi** ‘book’

**ucango** > hlonipha **uhlango** ‘door’

**ixhego** ‘old man’ > hlonipha **ityego** ‘old man’

**ingqondo** > hlonipha **indyondo** ‘understanding’

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes in Xhosa?
  - productive phoneme replacement strategies
    - inserting a palatal consonant /ty, dy, ny, y/ (Finlayson 1978, 1982)
      - izuba > ityuba** ‘pigeon’
      - ibhotile > idyotile** ‘bottle’
      - ukubeka > ukunyeka** ‘put’
      - udade > uyaye** ‘sister’
    - inserting a prepalatal consonant /sh/
      - ukugqiba > ukushiba** ‘finish’

# CLICK INSERTION IN HLONIPHA

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes in Xhosa?
  - “there seems to be an avoidance of the use of click consonants in the coining of new words in the hlonipha vocabulary” (Finlayson 1982: 49)
  - Clicks occur in 17% of the Xhosa lexicon but only in 13% of attested hlonipha substitutes

# REGISTER SHIFT

2. Do hlonipha words gradually become part of the regular Xhosa lexicon?

“The weakness in the argument is how clicks were generalized to unmarked rather than taboo usage.” (Mesthrie 2017: 529)

- Two words that are considered *hlonipha* by Godfrey but not by the Greater Xhosa Dictionary
  - **ityumka** ‘convert’
  - **unowanga** ‘stork’

# REGISTER SHIFT

Do we **expect** *hlonipha* words to gradually become part of the regular Xhosa lexicon?

Yes:

- hlonipha is “standardized”
  - GXD: “commonly used” hlonipha vocabulary
  - Finlayson (1984): core vocabulary of 55 hlonipha words
  - 113/966 hlonipha substitutes are mentioned in multiple sources
- hlonipha is not secret  
Married women are active users but all members of society have a passive knowledge

# REGISTER SHIFT

Do we **expect** *hlonipha* words to gradually become part of the regular Xhosa lexicon?

No:

- hlonipha is idiolectal
  - different for each woman
  - focus on avoidance rather than replacement
  - 966 hlonipha substitutes for 498 words
    - amanzi** ‘water’ (18 substitutes), **intloko** ‘head’ (9 substitutes), **ukufaka** ‘put’ (8 substitutes)

# REGISTER SHIFT

Do we **expect** *hlonipha* words to gradually become part of the regular Xhosa lexicon?

No:

– *hlonipha* is an identity marker:

Ukuhlonipha kwenzelwa ukuba umfazi azazi ukuba wendile. ‘*Hlonipha makes a woman know she is married.*’ (Hlonipha user interviewed in Dowling 1992)

“*IsiHlonipho represents, among other things, a linguistic means for Zulu woman to construct ethnicity and to take pride in a traditional ‘Zuluness’.*” (Rudwick and Shange 2006: 480 on Zulu)

“*Those who use the language do not only enjoy it but also take special interest in it because it provides them with an outlet for inventive genius in word coining.*” (Mzamane 1962: 233-234)

# OTHER BANTU CLICK LANGUAGES

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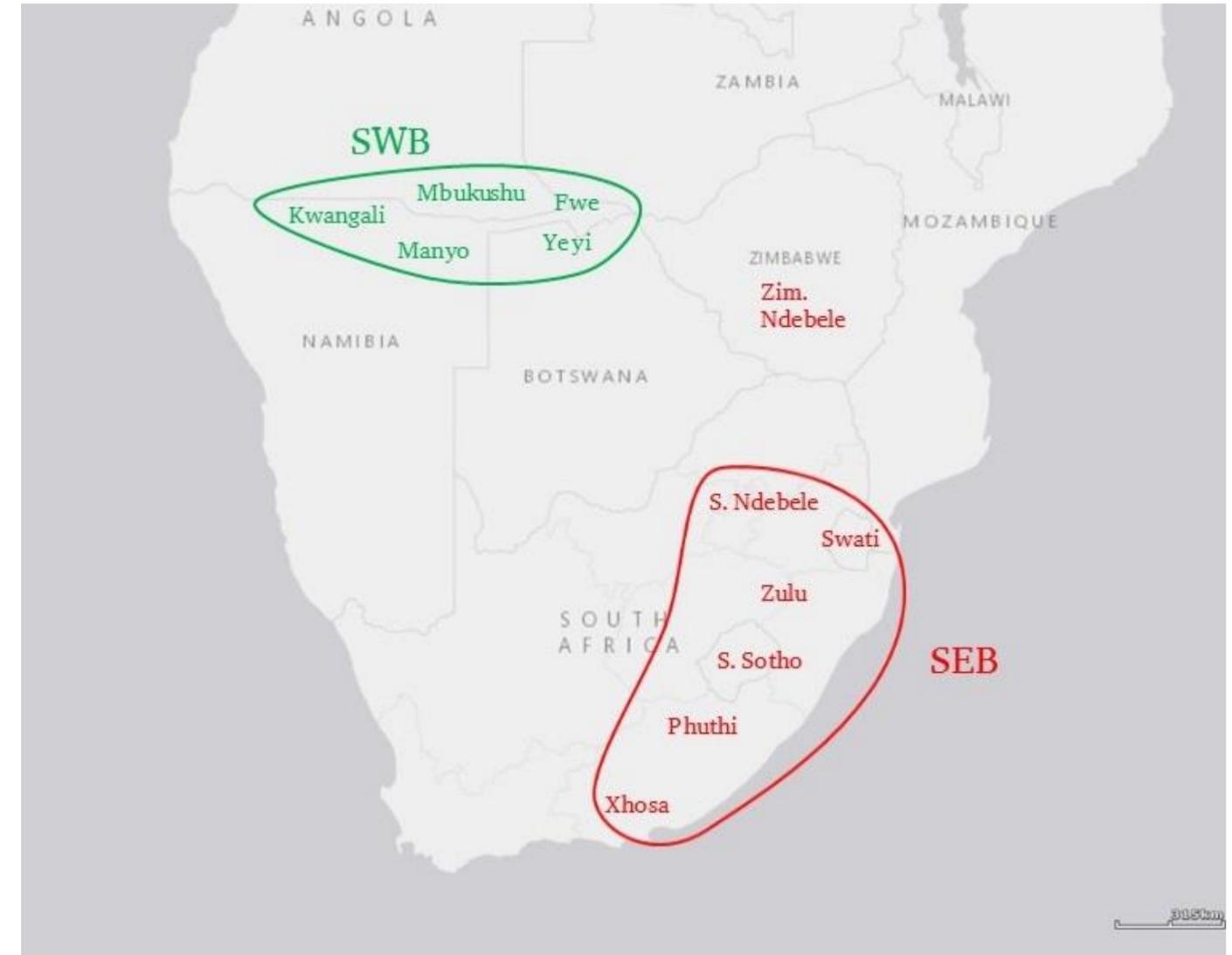
3. Do all Bantu click languages practice hlonipha?

- hlonipha is described for the South-East Bantu click languages: Nguni, Southern Sotho
- hlonipha is *not* described for the South-West Bantu click languages: Kwangali, Mbukushu, Manyo, Fwe, Yeyi



# OTHER BANTU CLICK LANGUAGES

- hlonipha is *not* described for the South-West Bantu click languages: Kwangali, Mbukushu, Manyo, Fwe, Yeyi
- clicks occur in originally clickless words
  - Fwe **g|ónt-a** ‘drip’ < Bantu \***ton(t)** ‘drip’
  - Yeyi **u-n!oko** ‘leftovers of porridge stuck in a pot’ < Bantu \***kókó** ‘crust’
  - Manyo **|umate** ‘tomato’ < English **tomato**



# RE-EVALUATING HLONIPHA

Did hlonipha lead to the insertion of clicks in Xhosa words?

1. Is click insertion a common strategy for creating hlonipha substitutes?

No: less than 1% of hlonipha substitutes are created through click insertion

2. Do hlonipha words gradually become part of the regular Xhosa lexicon?

Maybe, maybe not

3. Do all Bantu click languages practice hlonipha?

No: South-West Bantu languages have click insertion but no hlonipha

# OTHER EXPLANATIONS

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# IF NOT HLONIPHA, WHAT?

Possible other explanations for click insertion in Xhosa

1. Isikhwetha: secret lexicon of male initiates
2. Sound symbolism & ideophones
3. Identity-marking

# ISIKHWETHA

- Isikhwetha: secret lexicon used by initiated Xhosa men (*abakhwetha*)
  - Learned during initiation
  - Scarce data suggest that the same linguistic processes play a role as in hlonipha:
    - 50% of the isikhwetha vocabulary of one initiate consisted of click words (Finlayson 1998: 113)
- Xhosa **inyamazane** ‘antelope’ > isikhwetha **incamazane**

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

- Sound symbolism is described as motivation for click insertion in South-West Bantu click languages (Bostoen & Sands 2012, Gunnink et al 2015)
  - Fwe **g|ónt-a** ‘drip’ < Proto-Bantu **\*-ton(t)-** ‘drip’
  - Fwe **n|umpwí** ‘ideophone of falling in water’, **n|úmpwama** ‘to fall in water’
  - Mbukushu **n|ɛrɛ** ‘sound made by a bean when thrown in an empty pot’
  - Manyo **lûka** ‘explode (with a cracking noise), bang’

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

Ideophones:

“A vivid representation of an idea in sound. A word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity.” (Doke 1935: 118)

“marked words depictive of sensory imagery” (Dingemanse 2012: 654)

Xhosa examples:

**yatsho dyumpu emanzini** ‘It plunged into the water.’

**Wamtsho swahla nqempama ebusweni.** ‘He hit him across the face with a flat hand.’

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

Clicks may also play a role in ideophones & sound symbolism in Xhosa

- 30% of Xhosa ideophones contain a click, vs. 17% of the general lexicon (Andrason 2017)
- clicks also occur in ideophones of Bantu origin
  - ciki** ‘close’ < Proto-Bantu \***kɪɪk** ‘put across, obstruct’
  - cimi** ‘extinguish’ < Proto-Bantu \***dím** ‘be extinguished’

# SOUND SYMBOLISM AND IDEOPHONES

Sound symbolically motivated click insertion occurs in Khoisan:

- !Xam (Tuu, Khoisan): click insertion in the speech of animals & the moon
  - Moon, hare & anteater replace all clicks with retroflex clicks
  - Jackal replaces all consonants with labial clicks
- Ostrich replaces clicks with /t/ because “*The Ostrich’s tongue is not long, for it is round, it is bone. It does not resemble the tongues of other things which are long, for the Ostrich’s tongue is round. Therefore the Ostrich does not click.*” (Story quoted in Bleek 1936: 164)

# IDENTITY

Clicks may have been inserted and maintained to express a separate identity

> Ma'a/Mbugu (Tanzania): two lexical registers, one language (Mous 2003)

– borrowings

Ma'a **lu-xaremu** 'horn' < Iraqw **xareemi**

– formal manipulations

Ma'a **nkhunge** 'ankle' < Mbugu **nkhungu**

Ma'a **mseseno** 'pullet' < Mbugu **msese**

Ma'a **muru?u** 'sweat' < Mbugu **muruke**

Ma'a **nhxwahle** 'partridge' < Mbugu **nkhware**

# IDENTITY

Clicks may have been inserted and maintained to express a separate identity

> Ma'a/Mbugu (Tanzania): two lexical registers, one language (Mous 2003)

*“The deviant register serves to stress the ethnic identity of the Mbugu as being different from their Shambaa and Pare neighbours. For this purpose words are taken from a variety of other languages, or Mbugu (i.e. Pare) words are made different.”* (Mous 2001: 313-314)

# CONCLUSIONS

# CONCLUSIONS

Click adoption and insertion in Xhosa is the result of multiple factors

- the use of clicks to mark a separate identity
- the use of clicks in hlonipha
- the use of clicks in isikhwetha
- sound-symbolic use of clicks

More research is needed!

# FURTHER RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## Hlonipha

- Is *isihlonipho sabafazi* still practiced?
- What is the relative frequency of linguistic strategies used by modern hlonipha users?
- How is *isihlonipho sabafazi* used by speakers of languages other than Zulu and Xhosa?

## Isikhwetha

- What does the *isikhwetha* vocabulary look like?
- How was the *isikhwetha* vocabulary created?

## Sound symbolism and clicks

- To what extent is click insertion linked to sound symbolism in Xhosa?

