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Noun-verb asymmetry in Tshivenda vowel hiatus resolution

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iii. ABSTRACT

Languages employ different repair strategies to maintain their preferred phonological structures. This study examines repair strategies employed in Tshivenda to resolve vowel hiatus as well as to maintain the minimal Prosodic Word (PWord) size. To do so, evidence was collected from previous academic works (Poulos, 1975, 1990; Westphal, 1946), dictionaries, articles and descriptive grammars, learning handbooks, as well as educational YouTube videos. In Tshivenda nominals, a sequence of two adjacent vowels (vowel hiatus) is resolved by means of glide formation, secondary articulation, and vowel elision. In verbs, however, vowel hiatus is maintained. Evidence gleaned from the imperative, passive, and reduplicated forms suggest that Tshivenda maintains a minimally disyllabic Prosodic Word structure. Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky, 2004) and its sub-theory, Co-Phonology Theory (Inkelas and Zoll, 2007), were employed as the main theoretical frameworks to analyse the data. Further insights were gleaned from Feature Geometry (Clements and Hume, 1995). Thus, this study aims to present a comprehensive account of vowel hiatus resolution and minimality effects in Tshivenda. The structural features of Tshivenda are compared to those of other Bantu languages to situate it within the broader field of Bantu phonology, thereby providing a small but significant contribution to Southern Bantu phonological typology.