The AWSOM and RANDOM in Bantu object marking

Many Bantu languages mark objects on the verb by a prefix agreeing in noun class:

\[ \text{(1) N-a-va-et-eaa anca mUJhUmba.} \quad \text{[Nyaturu, Hualde 1989]} \]
\[ 1 \text{SG.SM-PAST-2OM-bring-APPL} \quad 2 \text{.girls 1.boy} \]
\[ \text{‘I brought the girls a boy.’} \]

However, object marking (OM) shows fascinating microvariation across Bantu, along the following parameters:

1. the **nature** of the OM: doubling / non-doubling
   (OM and DP can co-occur in the same domain in Nyaturu = doubling);
2. the **behaviour in ditransitives**: asymmetric / symmetric
   (only benefactive and not theme can be OM-ed in Nyaturu = asymmetric);
3. the **number** of object markers allowed: one/two/multiple
   (Nyaturu is restricted to one).

This talk maps the parameter settings of 50+ Bantu languages, revealing two gaps:

**Asymmetry Wants Single Object Marking correlation (AWSOM)**

→ Almost no language has multiple markers that are doubling.

**Relation between Asymmetry and Non-Doubling Object Marking (RANDOM)**

→ No language has non-doubling asymmetrical object marking.

I argue that these gaps are in fact not random, but can be understood as obligatory marking of salience, in the form of a [Person] feature in either the non-clausal domain (doubling) or the clausal domain (symmetry).