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Reconstructing Gur pronouns

A comparative research of person marking systems in Gur languages is an important tool for building the internal classification of the languages of this West African language family. To date, a number of papers were devoted to comparison of pronouns within certain groups of Gur languages [Manessy 1969, 1975; Naden 1986; Sambiéni 2005]. None of them raises the scope to the whole family, and none works with the "peripheral" Gur languages or Senufo, often claimed to belong to Gur as well. An important step towards the reconstruction of Gur pronouns was made in [Miehe 2004] but the author does not go beyond defining most widespread models as "candidate" proto-language forms. This means that the comparative analysis of Gur pronouns should be both widened (encompassing all groups within the family) and deepened.

This communication briefly summarises the results of the reconstruction of Gur pronominal systems and re-evaluates the current Gur family classification. It appears that personal pronouns can be reconstructed on the proto-"core" Gur level at least in three series: subject, object and independent / focalised. The distinction between the series lay both in the form of the pronouns and its position within the clause. The characteristic trait of the proto-language pronominal system was the vocalic alternation which has grammatical origins (possibly perfective / imperfective), even though it was deformed or re-analysed on a very early stage.

The systems of "peripheral" Gur languages (Viemo, Tiefo, Baatonum, Wara-Natioro, and Tusia) show drastic difference from the "core" languages and do not seem to be able to correspond to the reconstruction proposed. The same is true for the Senufo languages. The comparison of pronominal systems highly supports the idea of separating "core" Gur languages from its "periphery" and Senufo in the genetic perspective.