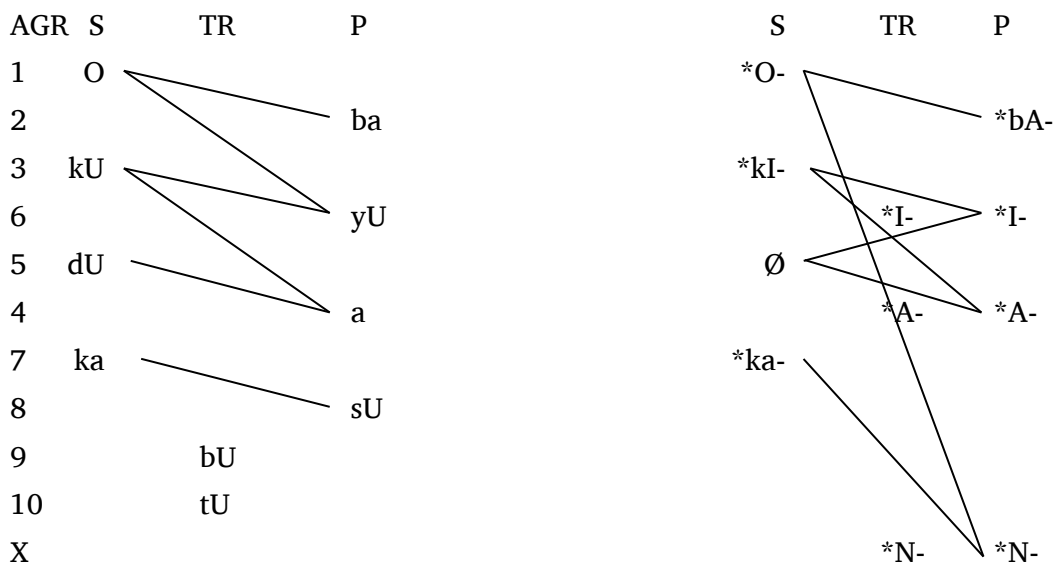**Ines Fiedler**
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Comparison of gender systems across Kwa

The paper compares the synchronic gender systems of different Kwa language groups in order to contribute to the reconstruction of these systems in Kwa and in Niger-Congo in general. The comparison of nominal classification systems in Kwa reveals huge differences with respect to their design and complexity. Whereas most Ghana-Togo-Mountain languages and Ega display systems with a high number of agreement classes, which are also overtly reflected on the noun, some languages only have remainders of such a system reflected to different degrees in their nominal morphology (Lagoon languages, Guang) or no reflexes at all (Gbe). For two Kwa groups, Ghana-Togo-Mountain (GTM) languages and Guang languages, a reconstruction of the system was already proposed. However, the reconstructions are based on different systemic components, as is also often the case with the description of synchronic systems: while Heine (1968) reconstructed Proto-GTM largely by means of agreement classes, Snider (1988) and Manessy (1987) relied for their Proto-Guang on noun form classes. That such different approaches yield very different proto-systems can be shown by a comparison between the system of Proto-Guang based on noun form classes with the agreement-based system of modern Foodo (the only Guang language with productive agreement but not considered by Snider), as shown in the figure below.

Note: X = no independent counterpart

Gender system of Foodo based on agreement classes (left, Fiedler field notes) vs. gender system of Proto-Guang based on noun (form) classes (right, after Snider 1990: 138)

This paper applies a more systematic cross-linguistically oriented approach to the analysis of gender systems, as proposed. i.a., by Güldemann (2000); it distinguishes consistently the three following gender-related concepts: (a) agreement classes as the ultimate basis of the system of genders, (b) gender (classes) as reflecting the classification of nouns in the lexicon/reference domain, and (c) noun (form) classes as the partial reflex of genders hosted by the nouns themselves. Building on a first application of this approach to Niger-Congo languages by Fiedler and Güldemann (2015), the talk aims at putting the comparison of gender systems in Kwa and beyond on a theoretically firmer footing in order to arrive at an improved reconstruction of earlier language states.

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