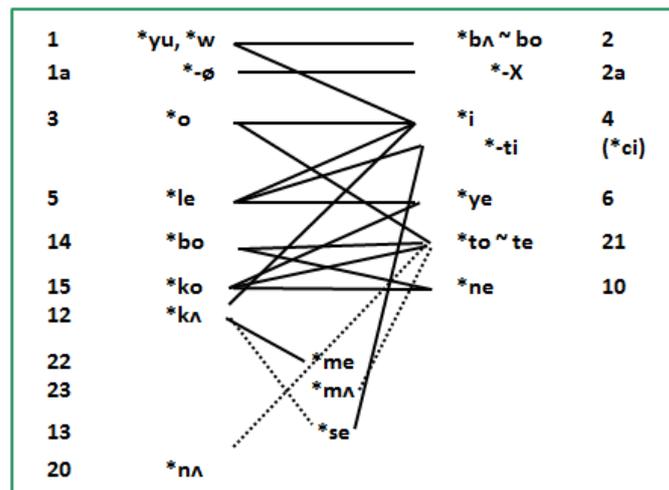


Class *nλ and Class *-ti in Samba-Duru, a subgroup of Adamawa-Gur

Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer, JG-Universität Mainz

Recent research has shown that Lɔŋto and the Gimme-Vere languages, members of the Samba-Duru Group in Central Adamawa, are outstanding within the so-called 'Adamawa' languages due to their particularly complex noun class systems. While the majority of languages in 'Adamawa' have largely reduced or even lost former noun class systems, these few languages and dialect clusters spoken in and around the Alantika Mountains apparently preserved archaisms in their noun class morphology which show fascinating correspondences with the class systems reconstructed for Central Gur (Manessy 1999, Mieke et al. 2012). The range of morphological correspondences apparently exceeds what was already known for Tula-Waja and Central Gur (Kleinewillinghöfer 1996), and thus further support and expand the (somewhat ambiguous and slim lexical) evidence linking certain 'Adamawa' groups and Central Gur (cp. Bennett & Sterk 1977 and Bennett 1983). The tentative reconstruction of the class system of Central Adamawa below gives an impression of the numerous cognates. The formal correspondences of the class markers and affixes are convincingly matched by similar genders (singular-plural oppositions), and the semantics and derivative functions of certain classes (in particular *ne, *to, and *se) within the respective systems.



Noun class system of Central Adamawa (Kleinewillinghöferms)¹

The main formal differences between this overview and reconstructed class systems of Central Gur are the vowel qualities of the cognate class markers. In Gur vowel systems with 9 or 10 oral vowels and ATR harmonies abound. This is not the case in Samba-Duru, although an ATR harmony may have been a decisive phonological feature in the past. Most languages do not differentiate between more than two or three vowel qualities in their respective class markers, with the result that class markers of distinct noun classes have merged phonologically. Prominent examples are classes *ko and *kλ (12 and 15), classes *i and *ye (4 and 6), and classes *mλ and *me (22 and 23). In most languages class *me and *mλ cannot formally be distinguished, yet *mλ is cognate to the *ma liquid and mass class while *me (cf. Gur *mu) forms the plurals in the widely attested gender *kλ/*me.

¹The reconstructed class markers are based on the concord morphemes as they are linked to the demonstrative pronouns 'this' ~ 'that'. The class numbers are an additional tag to facilitate the formal identification of corresponding/cognate class morphemes in Gur and Volta Congo language groupings, following Mieke et al 2012. The lines between singular classes on the left and plural classes to the right represent the most common genders or class pairings. *se is placed in the middle, which refers to its status as a 'singular' and/or 'plural' in distinct genders in the individual languages.

A comprehensive discussion of the impressive morphological evidence clearly supporting the common genetic descent of these geographically widely separated language groups would be beyond the scope of this presentation. We therefore focus only on the evidence for class *nɔ and class*-ti of Central Adamawa, which both share remarkable peculiarities with the probable cognate classes *da and *ci in languages of the Oti-Volta branch of Gur.

Samba-Duru class *nɔ generally contains only one underived noun, namely 'thing', and in addition a number of nouns of quality and state. These are either derived from verbs or represent the independent/neutral form of adjectives, e.g. 'newness; something new', 'height; something high' etc. The class pronoun of *nɔ may accordingly function as the neuter pronoun in the respective language. These features match most of the characteristics of class *da in Oti-Volta, major exceptions are the diminutive meanings cited in the quote below.

"Class 20 [*da] is only attested in Oti-Volta languages. Manessy (1975) gives the reconstruction *la for Proto Oti-Volta but does not integrate this class on the higher level of Proto Central Gur. ... The noun suffix and pronoun appear with an initial liquid or nasal, the vowel quality varying from a to i. ... The content of class 20 shows two major semantic fields: the term 'thing', compounds with it or deverbal derivations clearly referring to 'thing' (e.g. 'what is blue') and the neuter pronoun on the one hand, and the term 'small', compounds with it and denominal derivation with diminutive meaning on the other hand."(Miehe et al. 2012: 28ff).

The second case to be presented is a plural class which we set up in the overview above with solely its nominal suffix*-ti. On a first glance *-ti appears to be a suffix variant of the plural class *i(*yi), the regular nominal suffixes of which are -i or -yi), since *-ti chiefly occurs with the same concord markings. However, *-ti is not merely a variant of class *i, since *-ti appears to the regular plural form in distinct genders(e.g. *se/-*ti). A suffix *-ti as a subset within a plural class *i (or *yi) is also attested in class systems of other so-called 'Adamawa' groups, namely Bəna-Mboi (Yungur) and Tula-Waja. This in turn may indicate that this oddity might be an old and wider spread feature. Comparable phenomena are also known from Gur and mainly found in Oti-Volta languages. There a 'provisional plural class' *ci is postulated; its main characteristics are summarised in the citations from (Miehe et al. 2012: 34ff).

"Under the label *ci we group together different noun class morphemes, mostly suffixes, found in North Central Gur and two isolated languages, i.e. the pronoun ci, the suffixes -ci, ɲə, -hɲ, -k, -ŋ, -x, -di, -de, -rɪ and possibly -fi, most of which look like suffix variants of class 4 [*i] because they all show the class 4 pronominal concord."(2012: 34f)

Given the impressive number of clear morphological correspondences already attested, the evidence to be presented appears to be sufficient to also equate the peculiar plural class*-ti of 'Adamawa' with the equally peculiar plural class *ci set up for Gur.

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