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The use of data on minority Bantu languages to compare Niger-Kongo languages

The article includes an analysis of five minority languages of Tanzania, which are the only languages of intraethnic communication. Based on data, which have been obtained by the authors themselves from field research through questionnaires of respondents, noun class systems in the languages Jita (= Echijita E.25), Manda (= Kimanda N.11), Ndali (= Isindali N.30), Ndonde (= Kindonde P.20) and Nyiha (= Ishinyiha M.23) are examined. The impact of a strong socio-contacting Swahili, fortunately, did not lead to increased destruction of the primary system of the nominal classes. Unlike Swahili with its reduced nominal class system in the represented languages the archaic noun prefixes are preserved, in some cases, not mentioned in the classification by M. Guthrie. Moreover, at least 19 noun classes are fixed in these languages compared with 15 classes in Swahili.

In a number of these languages noun prefixes have an initial vowel. Thus, in Jita (E.25) *omu-* in *omumura* “master”, in Ndali (N.30) *umu-* in *umundu* “people”, in Nyiha (M.23) *umu-* in *umuntu* “people”. Other initial vowels of disyllabic class prefixes in these languages are /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/. In Manda (N.11) and Ndonde (P.20) the noun prefixes have the structure CV, rarely V.

Of particular interest are prefixes of classes 1a and 2a. Thus, in the language Ndali (N.30) *abo-* in *abokabwa* (2a) < *ukabwa* (1a) “dog”, in the language Manda (N.11) *vavi-* in *vavihemeleza* (2a) < *yaihemeleza* (1a) “shopman”.

The aspirated *bh-* in Jita (E.25) may be noted in noun prefixes of classes 2 *abha-*, 8 *ebhi-* and 14 *ubhu-*. In the language Nyiha (M.23) as the allomorphs of the class prefix 2 *aba-* act prefixes *awa-*, *avwa-* and *avw-*.

In all the represented languages occur class 11 (‘long objects’), identified through the use of the prefixes *olu-/ulu-/lu-/u-*, the diminutive class 12 with prefixes *aka-/aha/-ka-*. The plural form to class 12 is formed in class 13 *otu-/utu/-tu-*. Class 14 (‘abstract nouns’) in Jita (E.25), Ndali (N.30) and Ndonde (P.20) has noun prefixes *ubhu-*, *obhu-* / *ubu-*, *bu-* / *u-*. The augmentative class 20 *gu-* is fixed in Manda (N.11), and class 21 *gi-* appears in Ndali (N.30).

Semantic kernel of classes implements clear, for example, loans are allocated, as a rule, by semantic features. Thus, a loanword from Swahili *sahani* “plate” in Jita (E.25) is represented in class 11 (‘long objects’) *olu-sahani*, and in Ndali (N.30), for instance, a loan *soko* “market” goes to the same class with prefix *ulu-*. At the same time there is a violation of this general rule. The loanword *soko* “market” that has been already mentioned can be found in different classes in Ndali: class 3 *um-soko*, class 4 *imi-soko* (the plural to class 3), class 7 *ichi-soko*, class 8 *ifi-soko* (the plural to class 7).

Data analysis makes it possible to take a fresh look at the classification of Bantu languages on the morphological and semantic levels.