Cliticization cycles: adnominal gender-number affixes in Niger-Congo

Tom Güldemann[1,2] and Ines Fiedler[1] (Humboldt University Berlin[1], Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History[2])

Different opinions exist on the position and phonological status of adnominal gender-number markers in Proto-Niger-Congo. For example, Greenberg (1977: 102) did not assume that the so-called "noun class" markers were elements firmly bound to the noun stem in a single position. Since one finds today both host-initial and host-final markers, Prost (1964) and Welmers (1973) proposed that the proto-stage had both noun prefixes and suffixes. Finally, Williamson (1989: 33) claimed "that [class] prefixes are older than suffixes in Niger-Congo," which is the current common sense in the discipline. The controversy as such arises from the enormous diversity across modern Niger-Congo languages, which involves at least five different patterns, namely no affixes (but, e.g., possible number words), prefixes only, suffixes only, prefixes or suffixes, and circumfixes, as shown in (1).

(1)
a.	*àwàn (yō)*	'king(s)'	Kam (Adamawa) (Lesage 2021)
b.	*ù-lokú / bè-lokú*	'woman/women'	Lelemi (GTM, Kwa) (Höftmann 1971)
c.	*nér-à / nérɔ́-wà*	'person/people'	Yom (Gur) (Fiedler 2012)
d.	*li-kęn / kén-dì mí-ὲ*	'knife/my knife'	Sherbro (Mel) (Rogers 1967: 115)
e.	*ù-túk-ká / ù-tùk-nà*	'the night/s'	Kagoro (Plateau) (Gerhardt 1967: 179)

In our presentation, we investigate the historical question against the background of a new hypothesis concerning the reconstruction of the nominal classification system as a whole (cf. Kießling 2013, Güldemann and Fiedler 2021). According to this approach, the latest common ancestor that gave rise to the mainstream nominal system type in the family was a late classifier language in which classificatory elements had a phonologically more independent status. Applying both the traditional comparative method and arguments of diachronic typology, we review the history and very nature of modern adnominal gender-number markers across a maximally diverse range of relevant Niger-Congo languages. We conclude that in addition to the widely acknowledged origin of class markers in classifying determiners (Greenberg 1978), there is at least a second scenario whereby these elements emerged from bare class markers aka classifiers. We also show that cliticization of class markers occurs in multiple cycles and identify three language types with adnominal gender-number "affixes," which differ first of all historically. The three types are given for the case of prefixes but each type has a counterpart for suffixes:

1. prefixes that are synchronically clitics,
2. prefixes that are the first and only bound elements,
3. prefixes that co-occur(red) with subsequently developed suffixes.

Accordingly, similar surface profiles can differ diachronically. For example, the cases for co-occurring pre- and suffixes shown in (2), must be analyzed as the result of quite distinct histories. While (2.a) is a case of type 3 for prefixes, both (2.b) and (c) exemplify type 3 for suffixes, differing however between the recycling of own suffixes as prefixes in (b) and the borrowing of prefixes from another language in (c).

(2)
a.	*ù-túk(-ká) / ù-tùk(-nà)*	'(the) night/s'	Kagoro (Plateau) (Gerhardt 1967: 179)
b.	*fὲ̄-sὲ̄-fὲ̀ /ī-síέ*	'name/s'	Mbelime (Gur) (Neukom 2004: 39)
c.	*i-pepela-le / ma-pepele-se*	'guava fruit(s)'	Ndunga (Mbaic) (Pasch 1986: 60)

Our study thus contributes to the general cross-linguistic study of the etymology and diachronic typology of entire inflection systems via the grammaticalization of free forms over clitic elements to affixes.

References

Fiedler, Ines. 2012. E1: Yom. In Noun class systems in Gur languages, In: Gudrun Miehe, Brigitte Reineke and Kerstin Winkelmann (eds.), *Noun class systems in Gur languages: vol. II. North Central Gur languages,* 533-565. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe.

Gerhardt, Ludwig. 1967/68. Analytische und vergleichende Untersuchungen zu einigen zentralnigerianischen Klassensprachen. *Afrika und Übersee* 51:161-198.

Greenberg, Joseph H. 1977. Niger-Congo noun class markers: prefixes, suffixes, both or neither. *Studies in African Linguistics*, Supplement 7. Los Angeles: Department of Linguistics, University of California, 97-104.

Greenberg, Joseph H. 1978. How does a language acquire gender markers? In: Joseph H. Greenberg, Charles A. Ferguson and Edith A. Moravcsik (eds.), *Universals of human language, vol. 3: Word structure*, 47-82. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Güldemann, Tom and Ines Fiedler. 2021. More diversity enGENDERed by African languages. *STUF – Language Typology and Universals* 74,2: 221-240.

Höftmann, Hildegard. 1971. *The structure of Lelemi language*. Leipzig: Verlag Enzyklopädie.

Kießling, Roland. 2013. On the origin of Niger-Congo nominal classification. In: Ritsuko Kikusawa and Lawrence A. Reid (eds.), *Historical linguistics 2011: Selected papers from the 20th international conference on historical linguistics, Osaka, 25-30 July 2011*, 43-66. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Lesage, Jakob. 2021. Plural words in the Macro-Sudan belt. Presentation to the Workshop "West-central African linguistic history between Macro-Sudan Belt and Niger-Congo: commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Berlin professorship for African languages and the legacy of Diedrich Westermann", Berlin, 4-6 November 2021.

Neukom, Lukas. 2004. Esquisse grammaticale du mbèlimè, langue voltaïque du Bénin. (Arbeiten des Seminars für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft, 18). Zürich: ASAS-Verlag.

Pasch, Helma. 1986. *Die Mba-Sprachen; Die Nominalklassensysteme und die genetische Gliederung einer Gruppe von Ubangi-Sprachen*. (SUGIA, Sprache und Geschichte in Afrika). Hamburg: Helmut Buske.

Prost, André. 1964. Contribution à l'étude des langues voltaïques. *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, 70. Dakar: Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, Dakar.

Rogers, Henry E. 1967. *The phonology and morphology of Sherbro.* New Haven: Yale University, PhD thesis.

Welmers, William E. 1973. *African language structures*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Williamson, Kay. 1989. Niger-Congo overview. In: John Bendor-Samuel (ed.), The Niger-Congo languages, 3-46. Lanham: University Press of America.