A phylogenetic classification of Grassfields and closely related Bantu languages

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Workshop 1« Bantu and its closest relatives »
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« The questions raised by these (Grassfields) languages have a broad significance not only for African historical linguistics and general linguistic theory, but beyond this to the whole panoply of historical disciplines which are concerned with the problem of how and when the vast areas of East, Central and Southern Africa came to be settled by their present Bantu-speaking inhabitants »

Joseph Greenberg (1980, 39)
Bennett and Sterk (1977)

* Bantu zones A, B, C, D (in part)
* Bantu zones D (in part), E, F, G, H, K, L, M, N, P, Q
South Bantoid languages (Ethnologue)

- Beboid (14)
- Ekoid (8)
- Jarawan (15)
- Mamfe (3)
- Mbam (13)
- Mbe (1)
- Narrow Bantu (522)
- Ndemli (1)
- Tikar (1)
- Tivoid (17)
- Wide Grassfields (67)
Bantoid languages

• 150 languages (excluding bantu languages)
• Comparative work by K. Willamson, R Blench, J.Watters and P. Piron. (J. Good on Beboid)

• Genetic link between bantoid non bantu and bantu languages
FIGURE 5. Classification interne du bantoïde sud par Watters et Leroy (1989:433)
Figure 2

Bantoid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northern (Tivoid+Mambiloid)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Narrow Bantu (Jarawan, Ekoid, Mbe etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow Bantu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest (Grassfields etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4
Internal classification of Bantoid

Bantoid

North Bantoid

Mambiloid

Fam

Vute

(Nyannyan) Kwanja

Vute Wawa

Sundani Ndung Tep Gembu Atta Twendi

Dakoid

Tiba

Lamja Daka Taram Central

Ndoro

Mambila Njerup Kila Magu Kamkam

Ekoid + Mbe

Tivoid

Beboid

Nyang

Grassfields

Manenguba

Narrow Bantu Ring Menchum Momo Eastern Grassfields
Grassfields languages

- One linguistic unit?
- Internal classification
- External classification
- Connection with Narrow Bantu
Piron (1995)

- Internal classification of 169 bantoid languages (82 non-bantu), 100-8 words
- Three types of lexicostatistical methods
  - NN: nearest neighbour
  - FN: furthest neighbour
  - BA: branch average
FIGURE 1. Premiers embranchements de la classification (BA) et identification des groupes sûrs
FIGURE 8. Classification externe du groupe grassfields élargi (BA)
Grassfields external classification

• Proximity with Nyang and Ekoid

• Connections with
  – Beboid
  – Tivoid
  – Jarawan
Wide grassfields
  - *Ambele* (1)
  - Western Momo (2)
  - Menchum (3)
  - Narrow grassfields
    - Momo (4)
    - Ring
      - South (5)
      - East (6)
      - Center (7)
      - West (8)
    - *Ndemli* (9)
    - Eastern
      - North (10)
      - Mbam-Nkam
        - Nun (11)
        - Bamileke (12)
        - Ngemba (13)

From Watters (2003:226)
Figure 3. Grassfields languages

Proto-Narrow Grassfields

Ambele

Menchum

SW Grassfields

‘Western Momo’

Ring

Momo

Ndemli ?

Eastern =
Mbam-Nkam

South

East

Centre

West

Bamileke

Ngemba

Nkambe

Nun
Piron (1995)

FIGURE 7. Classification interne du groupe grassfields élargi (BA)
Wide Grassfields - Piron (1995)

• Same representation in 3 methods
• Ndemli is within Narrow Grassfields
• Nun and Bamileke are not clearly separated
• Two branches (in BA):
  - Eastern Grassfields, Ring, Momo, Ndemli
  - Ambele, Amasi, Modele (Menchum)
Ring (Piron, 1995)

FIGURE 9. Classification interne du groupe ring (BA)
Eastern Grassfields

• Dialectal continuum
• Four groups: Bamileke, Ngemba, Noun and North

• Questions:
  – Should the northern group be a separate branch (and the three other branches grouped together)?
  – Three groups: North, Ngemba (including Ngemba and Noun) and South (Bamileke) in Elias et al. (1984)
  – No barrier between Noun and Bamileke (Piron, 1995)
Blench’s SW Grassfields  
(Western Momo)

Figure 2. Internal classification of SW Grassfields

Proto- Southwest Grassfields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alunfa</th>
<th>Balo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanka</td>
<td>Bantakpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osatu</td>
<td>Menka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Busam
Grassfields Internal classification

• One genetic unit?
• Narrow vs. Wide Grassfields
• Wide Grassfields:
  – Western Momo/ SW Grassfields
  – Ambele
  – Menchum
• Narrow Grassfields
  – Inclusion of Ndemli
  – Eastern vs. Momo and Ring (Western?)
  – Eastern Grassfields:
    • North group?
    • Noun group?
Grassfields Bantu Working group

- 1974: Fieldwork on Noun class system in 50 languages
- 1978: Fieldwork on descriptive and comparative grassfields
- 1980: Noun Classes in the Grassfields Bantu Borderland, SCOPIL 8
- 1984: comparative Mbam-Nkam (Elias et al.)
- Results: Grassfields languages are a unit BUT some languages (Eastern languages) satisfy NB criteria (Greenberg-Crabb) but not Ring and Momo branches
- « The notion that the nasal prefixes can define a genetic unit is false » (Hyman, 1980, 207)
Stallcup (1980:55), Hyman

- **Eastern Grassfields Bantu**
  - a. nasal prefix in class 1 and class 3 nouns
  - b. no distinction between class 6 and class 6a
  - c. nasal prefix on all 9/10 nouns
  - d. absence of classes 4 and 13; class 19 rare
  - e. noun prefixes all carry a /L/ tone
  - f. no noun suffixes
  - g. class 2 or 6a generalizes to mark plural
  - h. innovation of -síng ‘bird’, -ki’e ‘water’
  - i. maintenance of *-úmà ‘thing’
- **Western Grassfields Bantu**
  - absence of the nasal
  - distinction between class 6 a- and class 6a m´-
  - nasal prefix only on some 9/10 nouns
  - presence of classes 4 and 13; class 19 frequent
  - most noun prefixes carry a /H/ tone
  - many noun suffixes, e.g. plural -tí, -sí
  - class 10 or 13 generalizes to mark plural
  - maintenance of *-noní ‘bird’, *-díbá ‘water’
  - *-úmà is lost, other roots come in
- **Plus:** maintenance of inherited 3rd person pronouns

introduction of new 3rd person
Grassfields lexical innovations

- cheek
- egg
- leaf, medecine
- mouth
- sheep
- to rub
- quatre

*- gek LH
*- bum LH
*- fu LH
*- cul LL
*-ji(e)l L
*- jok H
*- kua L
Hombert (1979)

- 108 mots,
- 30 langues (17 Narrow Grassfields, 1 West Momo, 2 Menchum, 2 Tvoid, 4 Beboid, 1 Ekoid, 1 Mbam and 2 Narrow Bantu (A40 et J22))
- Data analysis : Minimum, Maximum and MDS
- Results:
  - Unity of Grassfields
  - Exclusion of Ambele and Modele from Narrow Grassfields
  - Northern group belongs to Eastern Grassfields
RESULTATS DE LA METHODE MULTIDIMENSIONNELLE

DIMENSION 2 (Y_AXIS) VS. DIMENSION 1 (X_AXIS)  TEST DATA SET

TABLEAU 2
• Jukunoid
• Tivoid
• Beboid
• Ekoid
• Grassfields
• Narrow Bantu
References


http://www.rogerblench.info/Language%20data/Niger-Congo/Bantoid/General/Blench%20WOCAL%202009.htm

— The Momo and ‘Western Momo’ languages : Branches of Grassfields
http://www.rogerblench.info/Language%20data/Niger-Congo/Bantoid/Grassfields/Momo/Classification%20of%20Momo%20and%20West%20Momo.pdf


• Thank you....